



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

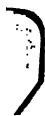
### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600072479Z







## Mr. Newby's Publications.

---

	£	s.	d.
Age of Pitt and Fox—Vol. I. ... ..	0	14	0
American Photographs—2 Vols. ... ..	1	1	0
Anecdotes of Actors, by Mrs. Matthews ... ..	0	12	0
Alice Seymour, by Mrs. Grey ... ..	0	5	0
Bipeds and Quadrupeds, by Harry Hieover ... ..	0	4	0
Beauties of Jeremy Taylor ... ..	0	5	0
Beauties of Isaac Barrow ... ..	0	5	0
Bible in the Middle Ages ... ..	0	7	6
Blessington, Countess of, Life of—3 Vols. ... ..	2	2	0
Beekeeper's Guide—Payne's Tenth Edition ... ..			
Catholic History of England—8 Vols.... ..	2	14	0
Condition for all Horses, by Harry Hieover ... ..	0	2	6
Charades for Drawing Room ... ..	0	2	6
Deafness and Diseases of the Ear, by Wright ... ..	0	10	6
Earl of Gowrie: a Play, Rev. J. White's ... ..	0	2	6
From Eve till Morn in Europe ... ..	0	10	6
Fishes and Fishing, Wright's ... ..	0	5	0
Historical Lessons in French and English, by the Author of 'Lessons on Objects' ... ..	0	3	6
History of Modern Music, Kieswetter's ... ..	0	12	0
———— the Kings of Judah, Lady Chatterton's ... ..	0	7	6
Hyacinth, Mrs. Grey's ... ..	0	5	0
How to Make Money by Horses, Harry Hieover's ... ..	0	2	6

MR. NEWBY'S PUBLICATIONS.

	£	s.	d.
Hints to Horsemen, Harry Hieover's ... ..	0	2	6
Intellectual Severance of Men and Women, M'Gregor Allan's ... ..	0	1	6
John Saville, of Haystead: a Play, Rev. J. White's	0	2	6
King of the Common: a Play, Rev. J. White's	0	2	6
Knights of the Cross, Mrs. Agar's ... ..	0	5	0
Latin Grammar, Arnold's ... ..	0	1	6
Manners and Customs of the Greeks ... ..	1	1	0
Military Organization, Captain Thackeray's, 2 Vols.	1	1	0
My Grammar Class, by the Author of 'Lessons on Objects' (in the press) ... ..			
Our Plague Spot ... ..	0	10	6
Prisoner of Ham ... ..	0	7	6
Papal States, History of, Dr. Miley's, 2 Vols ...	2	2	0
Rock of Rome, Sheridan Knowles' ... ..	0	7	6
Stable Management, Harry Hieover's ... ..	0	2	6
Shelley and his Writings, Middleton's, 2 Vols. ...	1	1	0
Shelley, Percy Bysshe, Life of, Medwin's, 2 Vols.	1	1	0
Sporting World, Harry Hieover's ... ..	0	2	6
Switzerland, Letters on, Goote's ... ..	0	5	0
Savanarola, Life of, Madden's, 2 Vols. ... ..	1	8	0
Spiritualism, Mrs. Crowe's ... ..	0	5	0
Sex in the World to Come, Rev. J. Haughton's ...	0	7	6
Things Worth Knowing about Horses, Hieover's	0	2	6
Wit and Wisdom, Mrs. Matthews' ... ..	0	5	0
Zeal in the Work of the Ministry, by Abbé Dubois	0	10	6

# AIMS AND ENDS.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

By C. C. G.

VOL. III.

London:

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,  
80, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1862.

[*The Right of Translation is Reserved*].

250. 0. 89.



1721. B. 1. 12.

1721. B. 1. 12.

1721. B. 1. 12.



1721. B. 1. 12.

1721. B. 1. 12.

1721. B. 1. 12.

1721. B. 1. 12.

1721. B. 1. 12.

1721. B. 1. 12.

1721. B. 1. 12.

# AIMS AND ENDS.

---

## CHAPTER I.

"But here is one who loves you as of old,  
With more exceeding passion than of old."

TENNYSON.

HOME again! home! What magic there is in that little word! To how many the greatest charm of any excursion lies in the thought of recounting every incident to friends at home, in the attempt to bring before the mind's eye of some beloved one there, the lovely scenes of a strange country, while every amusing or interesting occurrence or little *contre-temps* of

travel, is stored up in the memory for the sake of winning a smile from the home circle.

Lady Thornbury's home, however, awoke no feelings of this kind, and the regrets with which she parted from her friends was un-mixed with any pleasure at the idea of returning to Woodside Manor. She felt thoroughly depressed in mind and body as she drove up the long avenue and entered the lofty hall.

Maude, too, was tired with her journey, and with the exertions she had made to amuse and rouse Eleanor; and she also fancied the old hall and the dark panelled dining room looked more than usually gloomy, contrasted with the gay little sitting room and Tom's bright, cheery face, to which they had lately become accustomed.

Mr. and Mrs. Ferne were well pleased to allow their daughter to remain at Woodside Manor.

"For you know," Mrs. Ferne had remarked, "though winter is the most expensive time of

the year, and her fire would have made a difference in the coal bill, still there's the butter—really Tom does eat such a quantity, though I tell him every day he will spoil his complexion," and adding, with a sigh, "boys are so unlike girls—Eleanor never did eat much, and her going away has not made the difference in the bills that I calculated upon."

Maude cared little about the reason why; but she felt very glad that she was allowed to remain with her cousin, and the approaching winter looked less dreary to Eleanor when she knew that it would be spent in Maude's society.

Eleanor could no longer maintain her rigid seclusion, after the expiration of the first year of her widowhood, nor did she altogether wish to do so, and numbers of visitors made their appearance at Woodside Manor, as soon as the report of her return home was circulated through the vicinity, and many were the comments on the lovely young widow; some

averring she had never looked more beautiful in her brightest days, and others almost wishing to tear off those heavy rolls of muslin which partially concealed those well remembered shining tresses of raven blackness; but all were rejoiced that Woodside, and its fascinating mistress were once more restored to the neighbourhood, and the park never looked to greater advantage than in the early summer, when the beech grove was in perfection with its varied tints just mellowing the extreme green.

A letter from Mr. Ferris two or three days after their return, was by no means acceptable to Lady Thornbury; she had escaped seeing him during her visit to Oak Cottage—having ascertained beforehand that he was absent on business in Ireland; but business was unavoidable, and must be attended to, and under Eleanor's peculiar circumstances, in regard to Mr. Ferris, who really acted as her steward, it was deemed expedient by both the cousins

to shew him as much civility as lay in their power. It certainly was a truly feminine manœuvre on the part of these young ladies, to try and win the crafty lawyer to their friendship in case he should be acquainted with Lady Thornbury's dread secret—but so it was—and in reply to Mr. Ferris's letter, which announced his intention of coming to receive the rents at one of the farm houses on a specified day after Michaelmas, Lady Thornbury wrote quite a friendly note, claiming him as a guest for the time, and as she knew there were other matters to see to, and arrange, she hoped he would feel assured that a room would be always ready for him at Woodside Manor.

It was rather galling to Eleanor's proud spirit to feel obliged to adopt expediency so entirely as her motto, but with returning health her spirits had been much recruited, and she felt more able to cope with disagreeables than she had done a few weeks ago—

and in the present case her terror of an exposure, was the pivot on which all her actions turned.

What Mr. Ferris's ideas were on the receipt of the friendly invitation, we can only guess by that sinister smile on his countenance as he reads it, which physiognomists would translate thus :—

“ A wonderful change has passed over the spirit of my lady's dream, and she little suspects I have a clue to her reasons for present civility, nay friendliness—however, I will not neglect such a good opportunity, and I have no doubt I shall find plenty of business of different kinds to amuse myself with.”

So a polite acceptance was despatched to Lady Thornbury by that day's post, and the foundation of that web which was to entangle poor Eleanor was thus laid, though it is true her own passionate act had rendered it thus easy to throw the meshes around its victim.

It is well for all of us that we are uncon-

scious of the effect of our actions upon us in after life, or how fearful we should be of making the least move in life; as could Eleanor have foreseen all the consequences of her first step in deserting her only true love for the sake of gratifying dreams of ambition, not a moment of happiness would have been hers, even amidst the brightness which seemed at first to surround her married life; but the veil which hides the future from our eyes is truly woven by the hands of Mercy, and it is well for us that we cannot lift it off at our own pleasure, as most of us would at times perhaps feel inclined to run the risk of perusing our fate in the future, were it a matter of possibility.

Eleanor sighed as she put the letter into Maude's hand.

"What must be, *must*," she said, "but I shall be very glad when this visit is over. I really believe I shall feel better, stronger in mind and body, too, if he goes away again



without alluding to that miserable piece of paper, which still weighs so heavily on my mind. Indeed, Maude, I sometimes wish I had owned my foolish, thoughtless act at once "

"Let us hope for the best," replied Maude. "I think with you it is most likely poor Lord Thornbury endeavoured himself, when too late, to destroy it, and if it should have unluckily come to Mr. Ferris's knowledge, I trust he will also see the reasonableness of the supposition."

"I hope, Maude, I may never have to depend upon any reasonableness or forbearance on the part of Mr. Ferris," answered Eleanor sorrowfully.

The lawyer's arrival took place in the evening, and there was only time for a hurried greeting on his part before he joined his hostess in the drawing-room for a few minutes before dinner was announced, during which meal the conversation was, of course, general,

and Eleanor exerted herself to be more than usually gracious to her unwelcome guest.

“ You must not think of business this evening, Mr. Ferris,” she said when she rose from the table. “ You will find us in the drawing-room when you are so disposed.”

Mr. Ferris was not long in taking advantage of the invitation, and Maude, in spite of her anxiety, could not help feeling amused at the deliberate way in which he proceeded to make himself comfortable for the evening.

A flush of indignation, however, quickly succeeded to the transient smile when Mr. Ferris said :

“ Pray, ladies, may I ask for a little music? I hope your ladyship feels sufficiently recovered from your late indisposition to favour us with a song? It is so long since I have had the pleasure. I have been quite looking forward to it.”

If Maude was astonished at the request, she was still more so to see Lady Thornbury

rise immediately, and walk towards the piano.

“Eleanor, you must not sing!” she whispered hurriedly.

“Anything is better than talking,” was the answer, in the same low tone, and she exerted herself to sing, and Maude relieved her occasionally, until the arrival of the earliest hour when politeness allowed them to retire.

Two days Mr. Ferris remained at Woodside Manor—very long days they seemed to the cousins. The mornings were occupied in business, and great part of the afternoons also, on Mr. Ferris’s part; and Lady Thornbury made a point of never returning from her drive until a short time before the hour of preparing for dinner.

In the evening, the entrance of Mr. Ferris into the drawing-room was the signal for her to place herself at the piano, and Maude, who understood her cousin’s wishes, now asked for song after song with as little compunction

as Mr. Ferris himself, who was thus indulged with the most splendid singing to his heart's content.

The last morning of his stay at Woodside Manor had arrived, and Eleanor and Maude had begun to congratulate themselves upon the satisfactory manner in which the dreaded visit had passed off.

"Hush!" said Eleanor, whose sense of hearing seemed quickened by her nervous anxiety. "Maude, Maude, he is coming; I heard him open the library door. Do not leave me, dearest Maude; stay with me, whatever happens!"

Mr. Ferris opened the door, and Maude wishing to give her cousin a moment's time to recover her composure, said, "Lady Thornbury hopes, Mr. Ferris, you have given the necessary orders for the carriage to be ready at the proper time for taking you to the station?"

Mr. Ferris bowed—

"And," she continued hurriedly, feeling that every moment was of consequence to Eleanor, "may I ask you to take an early opportunity of calling at Oak Cottage? my father and my mother would be so glad to see you, and hear the last accounts from Woodside Manor."

"Certainly, Miss Ferne, it will give me pleasure to call;" then with a slight hesitation he began, "I still have a little matter of business upon which I must consult your ladyship before I leave."

"I know very little of business Mr. Ferris," said Eleanor, trembling and feeling her heart ready to sink. "So little that it is a great relief to me to find in my trustee so able, and willing a friend—one who relieves me of all trouble, one in whom I can so entirely depend," she continued, more and more nervously, her hand the while twisting and knotting her watch chain.

"I trust indeed, Lady Thornbury will

always find me her truest, most devoted friend," replied Mr. Ferris, with a sudden change in his manner, which sent the blood rushing to Eleanor's brow; he added after a moment's pause, "I must speak to you alone for five minutes, I ask no more."

"Mr. Ferris! I can have nothing to say to you which my cousin may not hear—I have no secrets from her."

"Have you no secrets from her? Not *one*, Lady Thornbury?"

"Not one," replied Eleanor with a flash of her old spirit, and looking him steadily in the face.

A sarcastic smile crossed Mr. Ferris's face, as he replied, "allow me to say that I may not be so willing to share all my secrets with Miss Ferne, amiable and estimable as she may be; and again, I request five minutes of your attention alone."

Eleanor could not speak, but she gave Maude one look, a look so full of wretched-

ness that her eyes filled with tears as she rose to leave the room.

She had scarcely done so, when Mr. Ferris rose, and took Lady Thornbury's hand, as it hung listlessly over the arm of the chair in which she was sitting. With an indignant gesture she snatched it angrily away.

"Speak to me at once, Mr. Ferris," she said "but do not insult me—say what you have to say and leave me. What have you to tell me which Maude Ferne may not hear?"

Mr. Ferris drew himself up, and spoke in cold, calm, business like fashion.

"Lady Thornbury—once—and it is not so many months ago, that you should have quite forgotten it—once you were Eleanor Leigh, you had no lands, you had no coronet—I loved you then, and offered you a true and heart-felt love—you rejected that love with scorn, perhaps you may scarcely remember the fact, it was of so little importance—let me refresh your memory. It was not enough to tell me

that it was out of your power to return that love—no word of pity for the misery you had caused escaped your lips—no look of sorrow for the wreck your own heartless vanity had made of all the hopes of a young life—those lips so cruel, so pitiless, only opened to make a mock at the ‘upstart lawyer’ and his anguish—you thought my heart was made for nothing but to be broken—well, we will let that pass, and come to the present. I have never ceased to love the woman who treated me thus; it is my misery, Eleanor, that I cannot drive your image from my heart; my affections do not easily change—one kind word will make me as much your slave as ever. Eleanor, Eleanor! say that word! say that you will have pity upon me at last?”

He had grown more animated as he spoke; the assumed coldness of his manner had all vanished, and Eleanor felt the truth, that he still loved her with a deep and intense passion. She had felt too much agitated and alarmed



to interrupt him, and now he stood there by her side waiting for her reply.

A tempest of thoughts rushed over her mind in that minute of time, but one only she seized upon eagerly—the thought that he could not know of the destruction of the paper. This idea brought back her self-composure, and with it all her old pride. Haughtily as she would have spoken to a servant who had offended her, she replied :

“Mr. Ferris, I little expected such a scene as this, when I allowed my cousin to leave the room. I was too much astonished to interrupt you, as I ought to have done, but once for all I must tell you that as Lord Thornbury’s widow, I am still less likely than was Eleanor Leigh to reply favourably to your wishes.”

Seeing him about to speak again, she rose and laid her hand on the bell.

“Stop, Lady Thornbury,” he cried, with flashing eyes, and misunderstanding her mean-

ing, "you *must* hear me yet again. I understand you, the rich widow scorns the poor lawyer with a yet bitterer scorn than did Eleanor Leigh; but sit down, Lady Thornbury, and let us come to business. What I said before was *sentiment*; if that had succeeded, well, it would have been better for both of us. Now, as I said, we come to *business*. When you burnt the codicil of your late husband's will, did it strike your ladyship that you were committing an unlawful act? an offence against the laws of your country, for which you are liable to be tried and punished? Ah, you look surprised!"

Eleanor had started from her seat, but fell back again, pale as marble.

"I daresay you may wonder who gave me my information? never mind that; we lawyers generally succeed in finding out anything we want to know. By and bye, perhaps the disgraced Lady Thornbury might be glad enough to hide her dishonoured head, even

under the roof of the poor lawyer of Ashwell."

"Mr. Ferris, have mercy!" groaned Eleanor, holding out her hand to detain him; for after those last words, he had turned and was moving towards the door. "Oh, have pity on me! I did not know—I was bewildered—it was my husband's wish—Oh, I know it was his wish—he would have destroyed it himself."

"This is all very well for you to say, Lady Thornbury; who will believe you? have you considered that? will the Judge? will the jury? No, no; it can be too clearly shown that it was for your interest to get rid of that paper. You can have no hope in that quarter."

"Oh, Mr. Ferris, spare me—help me, and the sum you name shall be yours. Only—only spare me the exposure—the public disgrace."

"Ah, to be sure, you think the lawyer can

be bought; you are becoming more reasonable now."

A gleam of hope shot through poor Eleanor's mind, and she ventured to look up timidly for one moment. Those keen black eyes, hard and pitiless now in their expression, were watching her countenance. How different the expression those eyes wore now, to that which had softened them so strangely but a few short minutes ago.

"Be my friend," she said, with an emphasis on the word, "and accept my friendship in return."

Alas for Eleanor, that she still looked so lovely in her sorrow and agitation! Mr. Ferris's eyes dwelt for a minute admiringly on that beautiful face.

"Are you aware what you are asking, Lady Thornbury?" he said. "Are you aware that you are asking me to become an accomplice in your own unlawful act?"

Eleanor covered her face with her hands—

"I do know it," she replied, faintly, "but I have still a hope that the sacrifice, great as it is, might be made by one who has received so many benefits from the hands of Lord Thornbury—from one who professes such regard for his widow."

"You are quite right; such a sacrifice can be made, you and I alone share the secret; a word from me, and you are disgraced for ever, pointed at with scorn, as the woman who while her husband was lying dead, had the presence of mind, the forethought to make arrangements for her union with her lover."

A wild shriek burst from Eleanor's lips, as then, for the first time, she realized fully the aspect in which her rash act would appear in the eyes of the world.

"Calm yourself, I entreat, Lady Thornbury," said Mr. Ferris, in the same, cold, hard tone; "remember what need there is for caution: one act of indiscretion on your part, and I might not, however much I might wish

it, be able to shield you from the consequences of your rashness."

"And you will shield me?" asked the unhappy Eleanor, in a scarcely audible voice.

"You will have mercy—you will not—"

"As my wife, Eleanor, I will guard you from every ill. As my wife, mark me, only as my wife, you will be safe—then—" he hesitated for a minute. "Then it will be for my own interest as well as yours, to preserve your secret."

He was silent, and waited quietly for her reply.

With a violent effort she tried to calm herself; one hand she pressed tightly upon her heart in the vain attempt to still its troubled beatings—the other, after a few moment's intense conflict with her feelings, she held out to Mr. Ferris.

"Let me have time; I must have time to think," she murmured. "I do not intend to marry again—surely I may be allowed to

spend the rest of my life in peace, such peace as is still left for me—be contented with my promise that if ever I could be induced to think of a second marriage—no one but you should—”

“And you will try to love me, Eleanor?—you will at least try?—you will forget my harshness—my violence? Dearest Eleanor, say you will forget all but my love—that deep, long-stifled love, which must be my best excuse. I cannot live without you, Eleanor! Say that you will forgive the way in which I have been obliged to woo you?”

“I will try,” said Lady Thornbury, and she fell back, half fainting.

He covered her cold hand with kisses—he laid her gently on the sofa, and bent forward, as though he would have kissed her forehead, but drew back as he saw the large tears which gathered on the long eye-lashes, and the expression of deep anguish which was imprinted there in too legible characters.

“Good bye, my dearest—my only love,” he whispered, and pressing once more the hand he held so lifeless and cold in his own, he left her.

Maude Ferne listened with an anxious heart for some sign of what was passing in the drawing room, during that long tête-à-tête from which she had been excluded. She established herself at the window in the breakfast room, which commanded a view of the hall door, and waited patiently until the carriage drove up which was to take Mr. Ferris to the station. A few minutes it waited, but not long, before Maude from her post of observation had the satisfaction of seeing him enter it and drive off.

Most fervently did she hope that it might be long before he again darkened the doors of Woodside Manor with his unwelcome presence.

A proud feeling of triumph filled the heart of James Ferris as he drove away; he knew



that he had won the prize for which he had striven, for he felt that having gone so far, the rest was now merely a matter of time.

He was conscious that the fatal power he possessed over Eleanor had made him the master of her fate ; he knew that proud and sensitive spirit would never bear the public exposure which he had threatened

Occasionally, it is true, the flush of shame dyed his brow, and he felt inclined to loathe himself for the part he was playing : he, the upright, honourable man, whose integrity had always been his pride—he—to lend himself to such a scheme—he, to sell his honour in this way.

He felt during that journey back to Ashwell like a guilty man, who fears every passing stranger suspects him, and reads his guilt in his countenance ; he dared scarcely raise his eyes to look any one in the face, and his nervous agitation was at times almost painful. The thoughts, however, of the fair prize he

had won, or hoped to win, soon restored him to composure. He had been playing a desperate game; he had trusted greatly to Lady Thornbury's inexperience, and to her alarm at first discovering that he knew her secret, and not a little to the fact that she had no one whom she would venture to consult upon such a subject.

So far all had answered his expectations. He doubted not in the vanity of his heart that in time he should win her love by his devotion, by the constancy which had borne so many trials. As he mused on these things the prospect grew brighter and brighter before him, and before he reached Ashwell, his busy mind had settled upon many alterations to be made at Woodside Manor, when he should be the master there.

## CHAPTER II.

For my heart was hot and restless,  
And my life was full of care,  
And the burden laid upon me,  
Seemed greater than I could bear.

LONGFELLOW.

THE two or three weeks spent at Woodside Manor before the departure of the trio on their northern tour was passed by Lady Thornbury in a state of great nervous excitement; so much had the dread of seeing Mr. Ferris again, taken possession of her mind, that Maude could scarcely prevail upon her to leave the house, and all her efforts were required to induce her ever to drive beyond the park.

Mrs. Crofts knew nothing of the secret source of anxiety that weighed so heavily on Eleanor's mind; but she, too, was struck by the change in her manner and appearance, though she naturally attributed it to her return once more to the scene of her sorrow. Both Mrs. Crofts and Maude hoped much from an entire change of air and scene, and Mrs. Crofts remembered that she had some distant relations in Cumberland whom she had lost sight of many years, and should be glad to take the opportunity of finding out something about them.

"You know, my dear," she said to Eleanor, "a great deal of caution is required in such cases. Of course if I should find that they have not been conducting themselves well, and are not respected in the neighbourhood, I should not wish it to be known that I made any enquiries after them; it might raise expectations which might be injurious; but if I should find them doing well, and continuing

to be worthy of the name they bear, why they may possibly be the better for their old aunt some day. They are living, I believe, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Carlisle, and when you have found some comfortable headquarters I daresay you will not mind my leaving you for a day or two to see them."

Maude was in raptures with the journey, and Eleanor also was interested in observing the scenery through which they passed.

Who can express their feelings at first sight of the mountains! all sense of fatigue was forgotten, when soon after passing Lancaster the setting sun lighted up the grand pile of mountains, in whose bosom lies fair Windermere.

"What shall I call them—piles of crystal light!" exclaimed Maude calling her cousin's attention to the glorious sight—there they stood, seeming to her like visions of a dream, or some lovely fabric of cloudland—fairer, more lovely than even her imagination had

pictured, with a golden mist quivering round them, with purple tints of heather glowing here and there, and the soft blue shadows between! They would fain have stopped the iron horse, which bore them along so swiftly, for a while, that the image of beauty might have grown into their souls; but they consoled themselves with thinking that they should soon make a nearer acquaintance with that lovely scenery. And while Mrs. Crofts slumbered peacefully in one of the comfortable compartments of the carriage, the two cousins continued to exchange exclamations of wonder and delight, until they left the train at Penrith.

The next day Mrs. Crofts was anxious to devote to making some enquiries as to her relations, which she thought she might be able to do in the town, and Lady Thornbury and Maude were glad of a little rest after their journey, so they drove to see the different subjects of interest in the immediate neigh-

bourhood, reserving for another day their visit to Ulleswater, to which they looked forward with great delight.

“And what success have you had, aunt?” asked Lady Thornbury, as they met again at dinner.

“I had great difficulty in finding anyone who could give me any information,” replied Mrs. Crofts; “no one seemed to know the name; at last as I was making some enquiries in a shop, a good-natured looking woman who was buying something, said, ‘ah, but it’s Greenrigg ye’re asking for—south country people call him Dalston, but ye’ll hear him called nought but Greenrigg up here—’tis an outside place is yon, and Mr. Dalston hasna many folk asking for him.’

“I talked with her some time as I found she came from the same village—Greenrigg it seems is the name of the farm occupied by the Dalstons. Old Mrs. Dalston is still living I find, and her son and daughter with her. I

---

think I should like to see them," she added rather timidly, for she scarcely fancied it quite right to deprive Eleanor of her countenance and protection.

"Do go to them, aunt, and I promise you that Maude and I will remain in the strictest seclusion at Patterdale, until you return to us."

So it was arranged accordingly, and the next day after taking leave of Mrs. Crofts, who seemed quite nervous at the idea of setting out to make acquaintance with those unknown scions of her husband's family, they started for Ulleswater. To those who know the beauties of the drive to Patterdale, by the shores of that lovely lake, the wild woods of Gowbarrow Park, Aira Force—as it comes flashing through the shadowing trees—the grand mass of Stybarrow Crag, falling so precipitously down as scarcely to leave room for the narrow road, and the mighty Helvellyn himself in the distance, any attempt at des-



cription would seem tame, and to those who do not know it, any pen and ink painting would give but a very poor idea of the scenery.

It was no wonder that Eleanor and Maude lingered over every step of the way—so that the mists of evening closed around them ere the winding road opened the last reach of the lake.

The day had been warm and lovely, but the white mist rose from the lake with a sudden chill, and Eleanor regretted that they had delayed their return from Penrith until so late.

“I am afraid you are cold, Eleanor—Ah! you are shivering—we should not have spent so much time at Aira Force,” said Maude.

“I wish we had not,” replied Eleanor, drawing her cloak closer round her; “but I had so set my mind on driving these last three miles by moonlight!”

“And now,” said Maude, “the fog is so

thick, we shall scarcely see it to advantage. Ah, look ! look, Eleanor ! there it is."

And as they turned, the moon emerged from a fleecy cloud, and looking large and red through the mist, gleamed above the crest of one of the mountains on the opposite shore.

"This is indeed glorious !" said Eleanor, in a low hushed voice, as if she scarcely dared to break the stillness of the scene. "Oh, Maude, that I could spend the rest of my life here—in this lovely land, far from all the troubles and anxieties that beset me at home."

"They would follow you even here but too soon, dear Eleanor ; it is better to face one's troubles bravely, the troubles I mean that come to us in the way of duty, and none others I trust, are in store for you just at present. I know you are still thinking of Mr. Ferris, but may you have not attached too much importance to his words."

"I fear not," replied Eleanor, thoughtfully ; "at all events I will not allow the

thought of him to embitter these lovely scenes."

As she spoke, the carriage stopped at the door of the inn. Lights gleamed from all the windows, and the bustle of waiters, and the sound of many voices, soon proclaimed that it was already pretty well filled with pleasure seekers like themselves.

Eleanor felt unusually wearied and depressed as she entered a pretty sitting-room which looked full upon the lake; she sank listlessly into a chair, and gazed out dreamily at the moon and its silver path across the water, while Maude busied herself in preparing the tea.

"Come to the fire, Eleanor," she whispered, at last, after standing a minute by her cousin's chair, and following the direction of her eyes she added—" 'So shines a good deed in a naughty world;' but no more moon-gazing to-night, you look pale and tired, and how cold you are; I insist upon your having some

hot tea directly ; you have caught cold, I fear !”

Lady Thornbury suffered herself to be led to the table, where Maude tempted her with all sorts of good things, but in vain.

“ I cannot eat,” she said. “ I own I do not feel well, or in good spirits to-night, but do not look so anxious, Maude ; I shall be better after a night’s rest. If Uncle Frederic were only here now to prescribe for me !”

“ Tea would be the first thing, and bed the second,” said Maude ; “ so you must consider him as speaking by me, and obey accordingly.”

“ I must first see if there is any news,” said Eleanor, unfolding a copy of the *Times* which the waiter had left upon the table.

Eleanor glanced her eye rapidly down the columns of the paper. “ Stupid as usual,” she remarked, and was just tossing the paper on one side, when her eye was caught by a paragraph.

An exclamation caused Maude to turn round, and she was horrified at the expression of her cousin's face.

"Read—read, Maude," she cried, pointing to the paragraph, "read it for me, I can scarcely see—what does it mean?"

Maude took the paper from her trembling hands, and read an account of the sad shipwreck of the West Indian mail packet; Maude's voice trembled, and as she came to the list of the passengers, it was with a fearful effort she nerved herself to look through the list of the names of those who had perished. Charles Stafford—yes! his name was among those who had sunk in an attempt to reach the last boat, after he had nobly exerted himself to save the lives of some of the women and children. They had been placed carefully in the boats, and had reached the shore in safety, but the brave captain and two or three more noble spirits, who had scorned to think of themselves while any others remained

for whom there was a chance of escape, were missing, and it was conjectured they had either gone down with the vessel, or perished in an attempt, too late, to reach the boats.

Who shall attempt to describe the agony which fell crushingly upon those two young hearts. Eleanor bowed her face upon her hands, and her whole frame shook with the violence of her weeping. To Maude it seemed as though a cold icy hand had been laid upon her heart, and turned it to stone; she shed no tears, one deep choking sob alone escaped her. But that minute—that one dreadful minute, revealed to her the truth—the truth which she had never ventured to own to herself before—that all her earthly hopes of happiness had been centred in Charles Stafford; and that they were departed with him, for ever.

Far quicker than pen can trace the words these thoughts passed through the mind of Maude Ferne, and all the strength and energy

of her nature came to her aid, with a determination that no one, least of all her cousin, should ever suspect her secret, or know what that sorrow was to her.

She could not speak for a few minutes ; she made one or two attempts to do so, but her voice refused to obey her, so she only laid her hand gently on that of her cousin and kissed her forehead. The violence of Eleanor's grief abated after a time, and she was able to speak ; and Maude felt that she had scarcely known the bitterness of her own sorrow until then.

Eleanor spoke of Charles Stafford as if he were still her lover, with even more affection than in the old days. She reproached herself bitterly with being the cause of his death, for it was quite clear to her own mind that it was in consequence of the message she had sent him by Maude that he had determined to come to England again.

"I know it is so, Maude," she repeated over and over again, "I have killed him—

him whom I would have gladly given my own life to save; I destroyed his happiness first, and now I have killed him," and she looked up with such a wild light in her brilliant eyes that Maude felt alarmed, and half forgot the load of her own sorrow in her anxiety for her cousin.

Nor was that anxiety without cause; before the morning Eleanor was in a high fever. The severe cold she had taken the preceding evening was greatly aggravated by the sudden shock which her already shaken nerves had sustained, and for some days her life was in danger.

Fortunately a skilful physician, who happened to be refreshing himself by the mountain air after the labours of the season, readily offered his services, and was so much interested in the young and lovely sufferer, and by her anxious and devoted nurse, that he thought no watchfulness and care on his part too great; and on the fifth morning, a few hours before



the cross country post could allow Maude to hope for the arrival of Mrs. Crofts, Dr. Cranbourne had pronounced his patient decidedly better.

As far as Maude was concerned, nothing could have taken her thoughts away from her own secret sorrow more effectually than this serious illness of her cousin. Hour after hour she watched by her sick bed, smoothed her pillows, and moistened her parched lips; while a sharper dart of anguish went through her heart, as every now and then some unconnected words painfully betrayed the wanderings of the poor sufferer's mind, in which Charles Stafford and Mr. Ferris seemed ever contending for the mastery, with every now and then an entreaty, which wrung Maude's heart, "that they would leave her to die in peace."

With what deep thankfulness did she lead Mrs. Crofts to the bedside of the beloved sufferer, now lying calm and conscious, though

extremely weak ; the thin feeble hand was held out to Mrs. Crofts, who hastened to take the place of nurse, that Maude might have the rest she so greatly required.

Maude smiled to herself as she read a letter from her father, containing much advice and many prohibitions from suffering herself to become anxious, or sitting too much in Eleanor's room. But one part of the letter gave rise to more serious thought; he said that Mr. Ferris had been over to enquire where Lady Thornbury was, and how long she was likely to remain absent—he added, “ when he heard of dear Eleanor's illness he appeared much distressed, and has made a point of sending or coming himself for news every day since.”

Eleanor's amendment from day to day was very slow, and her nerves appeared to suffer so much from the noise of a crowded hotel, that Dr. Cranbourne strongly advised her being removed as soon as possible to a more quiet situation, and Mrs. Crofts proposed that

she should spend a short time with her new found relatives at Greenrigg, who she was sure would feel proud to have her for a guest.

"You will be very comfortable there, dear Eleanor," she said; "luxuries they cannot offer you, but a hearty welcome and the best they have of everything."

"Quiet would do me more good now than anything," replied Lady Thornbury, "and I will thankfully accept your proposal."

As soon as her strength allowed her to come down stairs an easy drive took her to Greenrigg; the air appeared to revive her, and she was charmed with the spacious old farm house.

It was a good specimen of one of the old border strongholds, half castle half house. On one side the moat still remained, with the gatehouse and portcullis, and through the gloomy arch they entered a gay flower garden. The other part of the moat was destroyed, and a large farmyard, filled with flourishing stock

of every kind, amused Eleanor by the contrast it afforded to the more imposing front.

Mrs. Dalston, a fine looking old lady dressed in the stiffest of black silks, came to the door to receive her visitor, while her son, a powerful man upwards of six feet in height, carried rather than led her into the house, and placed her on a sofa in the sunny parlour. A tray with wine glasses and rich cake stood ready on the table, and Eleanor gladly accepted a glass of wine; in a few minutes she felt rested, and was able gracefully to express her thanks for the kindness which had offered to take charge of so troublesome an invalid.

"Nay—my bonny lady," said the old lady, "ours is the honour, and the pleasure; and for the honour of old Cumberland we'll put roses into these pale cheeks yet."

Maude and Mrs. Crofts now entered the room, followed by a strikingly handsome girl, whom the old lady introduced as "my daughter Mabel."

Eleanor was in raptures with everything at Greenrigg, it was like a new life to her.

"Aunt, I am ashamed of you," she said to Mrs. Crofts, after they had been there two or three days; "I could not have thought you would have uttered such falsehoods!"

"Why, my dear, what have I said?" asked Mrs. Crofts, looking greatly alarmed.

"Did you not tell me," said Eleanor, trying to look serious, "that I should find no luxuries here; and I should like to know what are all these wonderful varieties of exquisite cakes, what are these delicate girdle cakes, and what are all these marvellous jams and jellies of all manner of hues and flavours?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Crofts, "Mabel makes these, she is so proud that you like them."

Mabel at that moment tapped at the door.

"Will Lady Thornbury just try the grey pony?" she asked. "Lancelot has brought it to the door, and here is my plaid to wrap round her. Lancelot wishes to take her to the

fell side, where she'll get the fine air from the water, and it's not too far for Miss Ferne to walk. O! do try the pony," she said so earnestly, that Eleanor could not find it in her heart to refuse, and she was glad afterwards that she had made the exertion.

Every breath of that mountain air seemed to give her increased strength, and she henceforward enjoyed her daily rides, feeling every day stronger and better, until it became evident to her that she could safely undertake the journey home. Great were the regrets of her new friends when she announced that she had fixed the day of her departure, and it was gratifying to them to see that she was really sorry to leave them.

She sat long at her window the evening before her departure, watching the sunset behind the distant Scottish mountains, and the bright flashing waters of the Solway sparkling in the golden light.

Maude, too, had enjoyed the calm, peace-

ful life at Greenrigg, and dreaded nearly as much as Eleanor did the return to home life again. She dreaded hearing Charles Stafford's name mentioned in the careless way of general society; to her his memory was a sacred thing, guarded as a treasure in her secret heart; and she felt it would be a sore pang to her to have to speak of him as a common acquaintance, and to hear him spoken of by others. She gladly consented, therefore to accompany her cousin back again to Woodside Manor, for the winter, or at all events to remain with her till she was quite strong again, for she knew that what Eleanor said was true—that Mrs. Crofts was not a cheerful companion, and that Eleanor would miss her greatly in her still depressed and anxious state of mind.

### CHAPTER III.

"There is sweet music here, that softer falls  
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,  
Or night dews on still waters."

TENNYSON.

LET us now turn aside for a while, and see what progress these months have made in Bolton Park and its inhabitants, during the period of those agitating scenes at Woodside Manor.

A contrast indeed presents itself in the peaceful tenor of life pursued by them.

Anna Fleetwood proved such a real comfort and assistance to her aunt, that her first dreams of establishing her in a home of her own, now yielded to a hope that nothing



would call her away from Bolton Park, as both her uncle and aunt had become warmly attached to her, and considered her as quite a necessary element to their comfort. Anna Fleetwood's great simplicity of mind made her generally liked, but there was not sufficient force of character to render her otherwise attractive. "An amiable person—Miss Fleetwood, and a great comfort to her uncle," was the usual style of remark ; unless some comment was made on her musical acquirements, which were certainly rather above the usual average ; but on the broad principle that every heart may find at least one more beating in unison with its own, it seems that Mr. Evans invested the amiable Anna with an amount of charms sufficient to make him desirous to win her for his wife.

Mrs. Bolton had taken care to give the musical friends as little chance of private intercourse as possible, but if bolts and bars fail in keeping asunder two loving hearts, it was

not likely that Mrs. Bolton's measures would be more successful; and whether Mr. Evans contrived to illustrate his feelings for Anna by any particular pathos in those long, rambling duets, or whether pity for his peculiarities, which her amiability always attributed to nervousness on his part, effected the conquest, we scarcely know; suffice it to say the tender feeling was awakened, and whenever any of Mr. Evans's eccentricities were made a theme of amusement, Anna never joined in the conversation, unless it were possible to introduce some of the many really amiable traits which he possessed, and the good-natured squire was always ready to applaud her championship of the absent.

"Really, my dear Anna," he observed on one occasion, "your silence is quite a rebuke to us, but you must admit that Evans is the very queerest of queer men. Why, you have to steer very carefully yourself every time you sit down to the piano with him, or you

would get knocked down, or at least a severe blow from the music book. I assure you it makes me quite nervous."

"I am not the least afraid, uncle, or I should ask him to be more careful; but I have heard that extremely musical men are always very rapid in their movements."

"Oh! it is part of the mania, is it, Anna? It is really almost dangerous."

"But, dear uncle, you were saying only yesterday that Mr. Evans was very charitable, and I really believe he would give away his last shilling; and if he is rather peculiar, it does not hurt us."

"Well, my dear," chimed in Mrs. Bolton, "there are certain decencies of life which Mr. Evans ought to attend to, and as you take an interest in him, you might, perhaps, venture to suggest that a new hat and a pair of gloves might take the place of some of the new music he is always buying, in his next quarter's accounts. I assure you I was quite ashamed

when he came up to the carriage the other day, he looked like a veritable beggar, with that bent hat, and the brim positively torn in one part, and his gloves—why all the fingers were through!”

The Squire could resist no longer, but fairly burst out laughing, as he said :

“ All ready you see, Anna, for those chromatic scales on the piano.”

Poor Anna’s colour came, and doubtless came also a secret longing to mend the tops of those offending gloves, and perchance a wish that she could effect an unseen exchange of one of the butler’s discarded hats for the rusty specimen in question ; but she was not sorry to hear her uncle say that he expected his young friend to dinner in the evening, to meet Mr. and Miss Hastings who were coming, as he had met him in Ashwell an hour before, and invited him to come over.

Mrs. Bolton did not seem very well pleased with the announcement, but hoped the late

conversation might have its effect on her niece, not having as yet discovered a certain pertinacity of disposition, beneath that yielding and amiable exterior; and Anna had been so utterly unaccustomed to be singled out by any gentleman for much attention, that the evident pleasure Mr. Evans experienced in her society was a charming and dangerous novelty; and how often she longed to have one of her sisters by her side that she might enlist her sympathies, not having tasted enough of life as yet to know that the more exclusively heart speaks to heart, without any dilution of the feelings by talking about them, the better.

Why did Anna place that white rose so bewitchingly amidst the braids of her glossy hair, as she made her toilette that evening? Is she thinking of the description a certain friend gave of the very simple and unpretending style of ornament which he had so much admired in one of the Ashwell ladies the other

evening, and thus marking her approval of his taste ?

Dinner time came, and Mrs. Bolton's patience was sorely tried by the breakage of one of a new set of wine glasses, and especially at the nonchalance with which Mr. Evans contemplated his deed of destruction ; but it was evident that the musical doctor was in some extraordinary state of excitement. His rapid speech, the additional frequency of "very nice," in a most irrelevant manner, and the upward flight of both hands above his head on the slightest provocation, was almost too much for the Squire's gravity, as unfortunately the frontispiece of "Guy Mannering" arose vividly to his mind, where Dominie Sampson is presented in some such attitude in the library.

In due course of time, however, the ladies retired to the drawing-room, though not until Mr. Evans had torn the delicate fabric of Anna's dress, by placing his foot on the lower

flounce in his sharp spring to open the dining-room door for the ladies, but how thankful she was that her aunt had not perceived the last accident, as she at once retired into her room to repair the injury, and thus spared herself from any comment on either the broken wine glass or his awkwardness in general.

Stitch after stitch was put in, and ideas scarcely admitted before, followed as rapidly as her needle moved. It could not be really so that a crisis was at hand, and yet why had Mr. Evans so closely watched her intercourse with Mr. Hastings all dinner time, and too surely that unfortunate wine glass had fallen a victim in consequence of a merry laugh which an amusing parochial anecdote of his had called forth. Anna was simple but she could detect this, aided perhaps by that feeling of sympathy or antipathy which is ever ready in the feminine breast to meet the advances of another heart.

In her own case it was decidedly sympathy, and yet she seemed almost frightened at the happiness of the idea—not that any thought of imprudence, or the impossibility of marrying arose to torture her, but the bare admission to her own mind of sentiments as new to her as they were real quite startled her. She joined her aunt and Miss Hastings in the drawing-room, as soon as the necessary darning was completed, not wishing her absence to be commented upon by either lady, and taking down a new photographic album to shew to Miss Hastings, by way of an apology for her flight up stairs, she exhibited many of the cherished family portraits which it contained, and was delighted by the kind interest evinced by that lady as she turned over the pages with explanations of each *carte de visite*. At length the three gentlemen came in—the squire and rector making their entree as usual, but a rush on the part of Mr. Evans to a vacant chair by



the side of Anna, brought the colour rapidly to her face.

“Portraits I see, Miss Anna, likenesses I suppose—oh! very nice, very nice,” as he turned over the leaves of the book far too rapidly to form any idea of the countenances of the individuals depicted, but at all events it drew her attention away from Miss Hastings to himself, which was at present his principal object. “I looked for you in vain, Miss Anna, yesterday evening at Oak Cottage, where I fully hoped to have met you—there was no one there who could take either bass or treble of my duets, so I had the trouble of taking them for nothing, and the evening seemed so stupid.”

“I was not invited, Mr. Evans, or I should have been very glad to have gone; but I suppose Mrs. Ferne thinks I do not care to go, as Miss Ferne is still away.”

“Maude Ferne seems to be always away now,” said Mr. Evans, who only gave the

young ladies of the neighbourhood their full title when addressing them himself—"but," he added, "as we could not have our duets last night, do not let us waste any time now, as I have set my heart on playing them all through this evening," and he flew to the piano, when Anna took care that the dangerous music book should be safely placed in its destination before she advanced to take her seat at the piano.

"Fra Diavolo" was the first selected, of which Anna Fleetwood was accustomed to take the treble, and after some diffidence on her part, in thus being placed in the post of importance, the overture began, but the bass evidently could not keep his fingers within ordinary bounds, and away they went faster and faster over the keys. Anna trying, oh! how vainly, to keep pace, the ludicrous idea of a musical steeple chase entering into the minds of the audience. Quavers turned into semiquavers, and semiquavers in their

turn becoming demi-semiquavers, which caused Mr. Hastings to glance towards the piano, and this unfortunately gave the finishing stroke to poor Anna's increasing timidity, and now sharps became flats, and naturals became sharps to a fearful extent, which of course Mr. Evans attributed to the glance he had observed.

He could bear it no longer, and when they were about half way through he turned round sharply, with his fingers still drumming away on the keys of the piano, to see in which direction Anna's eyes were, and finding them steadily fixed on the music book, he, without further ceremony, began:

"Would it not be 'very nice' if we could always play duets together—I mean, if we were always together to play duets," and a sidelong and expressive glance gave the meaning he meant to convey, to his words.

"Oh, please don't talk until I have finished this duet, which I am playing shamefully,"

answered Anna, and I am sure the nerves of the audience must have been vastly relieved when it came to a conclusion soon after; but not so Mr. Evans, who was more confused than ever, and in a moment turning to another overture, he started off in the bass, leaving Anna to follow as best she might.

"May I write to you then, if I may not talk about it, Anna; but do not forget what I said in *Fra Diavolo*. I shall always remember the bar where I began—"

"Please don't," said Anna in a terrible fright, lest the spectators might hear even a syllable of his sentence, and really not knowing what else to say; but she collected her thoughts, and rose from the piano before the orthodox time allowed for her last chord had expired, when Mr. Evans poured forth his whole soul in that plaintive air, "Is there a heart that never lov'd," and it was the wisest thing he could have done, as Anna was obliged to appear very busy in disentangling a skein of silk in order to hide the tears of mingled fear

and happiness which fell like rain from her eyes.

Never before had Mr. Evans thrown such pathos into his music, which was in general deficient in that respect, and even Miss Hastings was quite struck by the eloquence of the strains. At its conclusion he went straight up to Mrs. Bolton, and complaining that he did not feel very well, begged to be excused for retiring early, and completely ignoring the rest of the company, he made a frantic rush to the door, and very soon a loud bang of the hall door proclaimed his exit from the house.

"A very strange young man that," remarked the squire to Mr. Hastings.

"I hear that he is very much liked in his as yet very limited practice, though," replied Mr. Hastings, "and he is very good natured."

How Anna thanked him for these words in the depth of her heart!

"Yes, one cannot help rather liking him

either, in spite of his eccentricities ; but what on earth made him bolt in that extraordinary fashion just now ? Did not the duets go right, Anna ?”

“ We got rather out of tune in the first, uncle, and I am afraid I played a great many wrong notes.”

“ But I suppose those did not send him away, Anna, did they ?” enquired her aunt.

Here Miss Hastings, who had her own suspicions as to how matters stood, came to the relief by saying she had observed he looked paler than usual at dinner time, and she fancied he had a bad headache, as she saw him putting his hand to his head soon after he came in, and she adroitly turned the subject by mentioning an interesting lecture on astronomy which had been given in Ashwell, and of which the Boltons did not seem to have heard.

How Anna longed for bedtime, and how tedious that remaining hour seemed before the

Rector of Norrington and his sister took their leave ; but when once in her own room, and having safely locked her door, then came the luxury of unfettered reflection on the events of the evening, and most ingeniously she twisted and turned the rapid sentence which Mr. Evans had shot out amid the thunderings of " Fra Diavolo," until she almost wondered what it did mean. Could he have merely meant it in joke, or as a mere truism, and to extend no farther than the actual words, and she blushed to remember how confused she must have seemed.

Then came the next request about writing, and what could he want to write about, unless he meant something real ? Then what did she say ?—the words, " Pray don't," were all that her keenest researches into memory would produce, " so, perhaps he won't write after all, and that was the reason he went away without even looking at me."

Such was the train of her nocturnal mus-

ings, which had not long subsided into happy dreams of scenes, in which she and Mr. Evans played most conspicuous parts, when a knock at the door, at an earlier hour than usual, startled her from her slumbers, and was followed by the entrance of a maid servant, bearing a note, which she said had been brought by a little boy from Ashwell, who said he had been told not to say who gave it to him, if anyone inquired, and had run away.

With a trembling hand and a palpitating heart, Anna broke the seal, and read as follows:—

“DEAR MISS ANNA,


“I cannot rest until I have finished saying what I so much wanted to say during the quick movement in ‘Fra Diavolo,’ which will always henceforth remind me of you.

“But to the point. You must have seen my growing attachment for you ever since our



first meeting, and surely our hearts have long conversed in those melodious strains which we have raised together. Will you venture with me through the intricate mazes of life? Surely there is sympathy in our hearts, and life would indeed be one long overture of sweet music, with you by my side to share my joys; and if our happier passages of melody should be interrupted, no one but yourself could cheer up the dirge of melancholy if it should visit us. It is true Fortune has denied me much of worldly means to offer you, but let us defy her caprices, and hand in hand pass through life together, contenting ourselves with that harmony of soul so seldom to be found amongst the rich in this world's goods.

“Anna! I must call you so, dear Anna! grant me an interview before the expiration of many hours, and fix your own place of meeting, unless to obviate any difficulty of communication, you will consent to



meet me near the Lodge Gate, immediately after breakfast to-morrow morning, as a personal interview will bring us to a much clearer understanding than a dozen letters could do.

“ You will perceive that I am only just returned from those too happy duets with you, and oh ! that I could waft these lines to you to-night, though I feel sure you could not misunderstand the impossibility of remaining so near you after my declaration at the piano, without referring to the subject uppermost in my mind. I shall be at the Lodge Gate at ten o’clock to-morrow morning, and pray do not disappoint me.

“ Yours, devotedly,

“ REGINALD EVANS.”

“ Ashwell,

“ Wednesday night.”

Anna read the note over and over again, as who does not read the first letter of this kind until every word seems engraven on the

brain? at least when the confession is in good tune with the feelings of the recipient, as in Anna's case.

How truly may the poet expatiate on the blindness of love! All the peculiarities, eccentricities, nay, awkwardnesses, of her devoted hero vanished into thin air, and but one grand truth filled the simple-minded Anna as she meditated on her first love letter. "He loves me, and I am sure I am quite unworthy of such love. It would indeed be very ungrateful if I did not love him in return, and I do love him with all my heart; but must I tell him so; and what will aunt say? Won't my sisters be surprised!" But the sound of the clock outside her door striking eight recalled her scattered senses, and she appeared at breakfast with her usual placid smile.

When that meal was ended, her uncle asked her to go round the farm with him. Anna did not like to make any feigned excuses, but did not accept the proposal with

her usual air of alacrity, when Mrs. Bolton suggested that, as the morning was damp, perhaps she was fearful of taking cold; but Anna insisted on accompanying her uncle, and trusted to not keeping Mr. Evans waiting many minutes beyond the appointed hour if they started at once.

But, as ill luck would have it, no sooner had they inspected the farm-yard, and commented on the merits of the respective inhabitants, than Mr. Bolton said, "You will not mind returning by the Lodge gate, Anna, as I want to speak to Jenkins about some wood;" so that they walked in that direction together, Anna only hoping her friend might not be punctual.

But, alas! what ardent lover is *late* in an engagement of that kind? There stood the rusty coat, surmounted by the bent hat, with its torn brim, and the pink tips of ten digits but too plainly visible!

“Good morning, Mr. Evans. You, too, are out walking early this morning,” said the Squire, as Anna half timidly held out her hand, which was seized with some impetuosity by her lover.

“May I hope that your coming here with your niece augurs favourably for my hopes?” said Mr. Evans.

This speech was perfectly enigmatical to the Squire, until the crimson hue of Anna’s face attracted his attention; but having once broken the ice, Mr. Evans was wise enough to proceed:

“I had supposed that Miss Fleetwood might have confided the cause of her early walk to you, my dear sir; but as your presence here seems to be accidental, I will not lose so favourable a chance of pleading my cause with you as well as with your niece.”

“Oh! it’s a cooing and wooing scene I’m in for, is it, Anna?”

Poor Anna was ready to sink into the

earth with confusion, which her good-natured uncle observing, he took aside Mr. Evans, and begged him to explain himself more fully.

We only hope Anna was too intent on her own thoughts to perceive the strange gesticulations and antics of one of the two as they walked on in advance of her, and we cannot think that she did, when on her uncle's departure for the house, Mr. Evans rushed back in a most characteristic style, and renewed his wishes that life might become a perpetual duet for them; and the interview ended in her assurance of returning the wish to the full, and of perfect readiness to encounter all the minor key of life, which might come to them in the form of poverty and the like. Doubtless she resolved that his hat should never go with a torn brim in future, and life smiled sweetly on her imaginings!

Poor Mrs. Bolton was soon made acquainted with the failure of her preventive remedies;

but as Anna was only a niece, and not a daughter, she was obliged to be satisfied that the young couple had no intention of marrying on nothing.

## CHAPTER IV.

I have griefs enough,  
Pray you be gentle—pray you let me be.

TENNYSON.

ELEANOR and Maude had not many days returned to Woodside Manor, and had scarcely settled down again into the usual routine of their quiet life, when Mr. Ferris made his unexpected appearance one afternoon. He had heard, he said, with the deepest concern of Lady Thornbury's severe illness in Cumberland, and though he had received better accounts lately from Mr. and Mrs. Ferne, who had been most kind in answering his repeated enquiries as to her state, now that he had




heard from them of the return of the travellers to their home, he could no longer restrain his impatience to see for himself how she really was.

He did not intend to have come so suddenly and unceremoniously, but business had called him to London, and that accomplished sooner than he had expected, the temptation had proved too strong to allow of his passing the Warrendale station.

Eleanor's recent illness was an excuse for her seeing but little of Mr. Ferris, except in the evening; and she and Maude left him chiefly to the society of Mrs. Crofts, trusting that he would soon tire of it, and relieve them of his unwelcome presence. Such, however, did not appear to be his intentions.

Greatly irritated by Eleanor's avoidance of him, he determined that he would not leave Woodside this time, without coming to an explanation with her. He trembled when he remembered how nearly that precious prize



had been snatched from his grasp by the power of that dread enemy, to whom all bright hopes must give way. And now, now he would secure it before any other chance should interfere!

He had also seen an account of the shipwreck, and connecting in his own mind the name of Charles Stafford amongst the list of the lost with Lady Thornbury's illness, which followed so immediately, he felt that he had great reason to congratulate himself upon the death of one who must, had he lived to return to England, have proved a formidable rival. He well knew the fatal power over her actions which chance had thrown in his way, and his own determination to use that power to the uttermost; still he scarcely liked to admit the fact to his own mind that tyranny alone could induce her to be his wife, and a great desire to ingratiate himself into her affection had taken possession of his mind.


And this he flattered himself in his vanity

would not be so difficult a matter, since she had lost all hopes of recalling her old love. He tried to enlist her sympathy for his pet sister Lucy, by asking if he might read portions of the long letters he received from her, and he invariably selected passages which spoke of her deep affection for himself, and of warm interest in Lady Thornbury and Maude ; and Eleanor's feelings, which were easily moved, could not listen stoically to the touching words with which Lucy's letter abounded.

"Dear Lady Thornbury," he said one evening, after he had expressed his delight at seeing her looking so much better and stronger, "may I read you a letter I received from my sister this morning ; it contains messages to you and Miss Ferne."

Eleanor replied with an air of interest, that it would give her pleasure to hear it.

The letter contained a long description of a book she had just finished reading, and which gave an account of a young girl, who, like



herself had been denied that grace of form which nature generally bestows on woman-kind, and most touching were the allusions to her own deformity and its consequences, in debarring her from many of the pleasures of her age, &c.

When Mr. Ferris had finished reading, he saw tears in the eyes of both his listeners, and Eleanor asked if it would be impossible for her to bear the journey to Woodside Manor, as the change might be pleasant to the invalid, and it would be a real delight to Maude and herself to take every possible care of her, if the transit could be effected.

Mr. Ferris thanked her warmly, and only wished it could be accomplished, but he feared his mother would at present be afraid of the experiment, much as she would appreciate the very kind thought which suggested it. He then mentioned that he was going to take a long walk, which might possibly extend beyond luncheon-time, so that he begged the

ladies would not think about him until dinner; but this request was more easily made than complied with, as no sooner had he taken his departure than Eleanor and Maude fell into a long discourse about him, and his evident affection for his poor afflicted sister, which was at all events one good trait in his character. And Maude waxed quite warm in defending the absent Mr. Ferris from the too severe condemnation of Lady Thornbury.

And what were the musings which filled the heart of that "man of business," as Eleanor persisted in calling him, in her conversation? Were they of deeds and parchments, dry and musty? or were they not brighter visions of his own establishment as master of Woodside Manor, and above all the lord of so exquisite a bride as Eleanor must make. Charles Stafford's death had decided him upon one point, namely, that Lady Thornbury's conditional engagement should become a certain one, and herself pledged to become his

wife within a short time. Deep and crafty were the cogitations which racked his brain as to how to accomplish this end without increasing the hatred of his victim, as, though he hoped he was now less obnoxious to her than a few months ago, when he had first mentioned the subject (and here he recalled her tearful sympathy with his sister), he was still too well aware that he was not yet in possession of her heart. This fact, however, he treated with comparative indifference, as he felt convinced if she were once his, she would soon transfer the affection to himself. Why should she not, he thought, if she had so easily been won by Lord Thornbury to do so once before ?

But we need not pursue the plans which were accepted or abandoned as he walked on for miles without any sense of fatigue, and though he reached Woodside again by four o'clock, he shut himself up in his room until dinner time, when he again joined the party,

though in a very absent mood, which excited a remark from Mrs. Crofts, to the effect that he must be very much fatigued.

"On the contrary, Madam," he replied, "and as I have business of importance to transact this evening, when I must request Lady Thornbury's attention for an hour or two relative to a new lease, I must hope you ladies have not been over exerting yourselves."

He dared not look at Lady Thornbury as he spoke, having still some remains of conscience, in the feeling that he was luring a victim into his net by unfair means.

"Oh, the cares of property," said Eleanor, half-laughing; "but you shall not say I am not a woman of business, so I will despatch it immediately after dinner, if that will suit you, Mr. Ferris?"

The lawyer bowed an assent, and when Mrs. Crofts and Maude were ready to adjourn to the drawing-room, she took possession

of the easy chair, knowing that her guest never remained many minutes at the table after the party was dispersed.

A sense of uneasiness however seized her as Mr. Ferris rose from the table, and taking a chair placed it very near her own, looking at her for some moments in silence. She could not endure that look, and a deep colour stole over her face.

“I hope you have nothing unpleasant to communicate in regard to my tenants?” she asked hurriedly. “I own I felt a little apprehension when Mrs. Crofts was telling me of the difficulties into which her cousin, Mr. Dacre had fallen lately in regard to his property.”

This straightforward enquiry rather increased than relieved Mr. Ferris’s dilemma.

“Oh no, Lady Thornbury; my business, as you must know very well, is at this moment of a strictly private nature. I can bear suspense no longer, and I call upon you now to



ratify the conditional promise you made me when we spoke last on this subject. I will not again tell you of my love, which has remained unchanged through your scorn, through your contempt and assumed indifference. I will only say that this indifference is become intolerable to me, and I can wait no longer to hear you give your promise to be mine."

He took her hand as he spoke; Eleanor's heart beat violently, and her deadly paleness half alarmed her lover, but conquering her momentary weakness she tried to withdraw her hand, as she replied faintly:

"I had trusted to your generosity, I had thought you would have been contented with the promise you had wrung from me. Or at all events that you would have had the wisdom to wait patiently, until my gratitude for your forbearance might have overcome other feelings: at present my hand, as you must know, would be but a sorry gift, and one which you would afterwards most bitterly repent.

---

How few men would value an extorted gift of the hand when the heart went not with it," continued Eleanor. "Is this fair?—is this generous, Mr. Ferris, to take advantage of my position in my own house to renew this hateful subject."

She shuddered and burst into tears, which however gave him an opportunity of pouring forth whole strains of impassioned feelings into her unwilling ears.

"Give me your promise, Eleanor, to become my wife, and that soon, and all will be well. Had Mr. Stafford never crossed my path you would never have refused me; you cannot deny that until he rose on your horizon I was not deemed unworthy of your notice."

Indignantly she replied :

"I cannot allow Mr. Stafford's name to be introduced into this conversation. Once for all, I must tell you that I have no intention of altering my present condition, and all I ask is to be left in peace."

"Are all my pleadings then in vain, Eleanor; and must I remind you once again that you *dare not* refuse the promise I ask?"

Eleanor shuddered.

"Oh! have you not learnt mercy then? Is this the end of all your promises to allow me time? What time have you given me?"

"I have waited, Eleanor, long and patiently; for weeks I have waited, without one relenting word from you. I will wait no longer! Our wedding day must be before many weeks are over—nay, I dare not trust you longer. Willingly or unwillingly, you must be my wife, Eleanor; for your own sake, for all our sakes I advise you to acquiesce quietly."

"I have given you my word!" she cried, in a tone of anguish, "all I ask is to be left alone in peace. Woodside shall be yours—O! how gladly!"

"What care I for Woodside without you, Eleanor? Do not mock me in this way, you know that you have been the one object of my life!"

Eleanor felt a sickening conviction that the meshes of the fatal web were fast closing round her, and weakened as she was both in mind and body by the trials she had gone through, as well as by illness, she could no longer contend against her fate.


Charles Stafford was no more! All her dreams of earthly happiness were buried with him; and, in an almost reckless state of mind, she thought it mattered little how the short remains of her life should be spent.

A long conversation ensued, of which it is sufficient to say that all her entreaties proved of no avail; the weaker will of woman was compelled to yield to the strong and unscrupulous will of man, especially as it was so linked with a legal terror, the very vagueness of which rendered it a more terrible instrument in his hands, and the unhappy Eleanor was only released as the affianced wife of Mr. Ferris. She retired to her room, after sending a message to Maude and Mrs. Crofts that she

begged to be excused, as a bad headache coming on, she would be glad not to be disturbed. The next morning she appeared at the breakfast-table, calm but deadly pale, and so painfully subdued in manner, that Maude guessed the solution to the enigma which so puzzled Mrs. Crofts.

Mr. Ferris had the consideration not to claim the rights of devoted attention to his hostess, and he too wore an air of pensiveness, though Maude fancied at times that she could detect a dash of self-gratulation and triumph about the corners of his mouth.

When he had left the room, Eleanor quietly informed her aunt of her acceptance of Mr. Ferris's proposals, but implored both her and Maude to spare her any further remarks on the subject. Mrs. Crofts was astounded, and could not help shewing her surprise. Maude kissed Eleanor, and a few tears fell on her face; she dared not remonstrate with her cousin now, but the sight of that woe-worn



face, and the tears in those dear eyes were almost more than she could bear.

After a while, when Mrs. Crofts had left the room, Eleanor was by degrees able to tell her cousin the result of her interview with Mr. Ferris. Maude allowed her to weep on in silence, feeling that tears might possibly at present give her the only relief she was capable of feeling. And truly Maude knew not how to offer consolation; sympathy alone she could offer, and that indeed was all Eleanor could accept.

The violence of Eleanor's sorrow exhausted itself after a while, and when Mrs. Crofts joined the cousins at luncheon, she had in a great measure recovered her composure, though a severe headache served as an excuse for her pale looks and heavy eyes.

The next days slipped by somehow or other, as time will always slip by, whether one is happy or miserable; whether the happy hours seem all too short for the glad spirit

that rejoices in each bright day as it dawns, or whether to the stricken soul each leaden minute is marked by a throb of pain. Maude sorrowed with her cousin, but in her sorrow there was not that bitterest ingredient—remorse; none of that sad looking back upon the past, that ever gnawing sting of self-reproach, “sharper than a serpent’s tooth,” which was Eleanor’s portion.



## CHAPTER V.

"The day is cold and dark and dreary,  
It rains and the rain is never weary."

A DISTRESSING state of restlessness now seized Eleanor, and Maude watched with ever increasing pain, the fitful waywardness of manner, and the wild light that burnt in her eye.

"Maude," she said one afternoon, after returning from a ride with Mr. Ferris, who now assumed all the rights of an accepted lover, "Maude, he tells me it is fit that I should introduce him to my neighbours, that I should proclaim my bondage in the eyes of the world. Am I not obedient? see here is a list, will you



help me to write the invitations—a large dinner party on the 16th, another on the 18th, and after that my lover will return home to business.”

“Eleanor, Eleanor! you cannot really mean this! it will be too much for you, no one will expect—”

“No one will expect it, as you say, Maude. Mrs. Archer said to me the other day that she hoped in time I might find the bitterness of my bereavement less; that indeed it would be a great trial to me to mix in society again, but that it was evident my health was failing under the burden of my grief, and that she thought, if I would make the effort of seeing two or three friends occasionally, it might be good for me, and might divert my mind a little from dwelling on my irreparable loss!”

The bitter tone in which Eleanor spoke was most painful to Maude's feelings; she was angry too with Mr. Ferris for so soon assuming

the direction of her actions, but still she could understand the motives which induced him to wish that the fact of his approaching marriage should become generally known in the neighbourhood.

She took the paper from Eleanor's hand, and began to write the little notes of invitation, her cousin sitting by her side the while, dreamily playing with her pen, instead of taking her part in the writing.

Mr. Ferris presently entered the room and looked over Eleanor's shoulder

"Idly disposed, Eleanor?" he asked, "pray make me of some use, let me seal these at all events," and he took some notes from Maude's hand as he spoke.

It required all the self-control of which she was mistress to watch him assuming the air of a privileged friend, but feeling how unwise it would be for Eleanor's sake to irritate him in any way, she quietly handed him note after note, while Lady Thornbury looked on with the same absent air.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Mr. Ferris, suddenly turning round to look at her.

Eleanor started and her cheeks crimsoned.

"Shall I guess?" he added, with a look from his black eyes so keen and penetrating that she blushed yet more beneath it.

"You need not take that trouble," she replied; "I was thinking of Mrs. Archer, and of her surprise when she opens her note."

"Mrs. Archer will think you are following good advice in emerging from your seclusion, and Mr. Archer will rejoice in the prospect of a good dinner."

"Sir Cranford Wynne is staying with them," said the unconscious Maude, "is a note to be sent to him?"

"Certainly," replied Eleanor, "Mr. Ferris desires that no old friend may be omitted."

"Has Sir Cranford Wynne been long in the neighbourhood?" asked Mr Ferris.

Eleanor thought the question unworthy of

a reply and turned away, so that Mr. Ferris again addressed the enquiry to Maude.

"No, he had only just arrived when we called yesterday," answered Maude.

"Then in all probability he will remain some time, Miss Ferne?"

"I suppose so—Lady Thornbury I think, told me that when he was in England he spent the greater part of his time with the Archers."

Mr. Ferris was silent for a few moments and then said, "Lady Thornbury, you have been kind enough to yield to my wishes in making our engagement public. You will think me very unreasonable, but I have another request to make."

Eleanor appeared scarcely to hear him, but he laid his hand on hers, and then a violent start and shudder showed that she was not so utterly insensible as she wished to appear. She withdrew her hand quickly, and faced him with an angry brow.

"Mr. Ferris may as well remember," she

said, "that he commands in this house—it is useless to keep up the farce of pretending it is otherwise. I only wait to hear what it pleases him to order."

Mr. Ferris bit his lips, but did not apparently choose to attempt any remonstrance.

"I wish, then," he said, "that you would ask my mother and sister to visit you: it need not be for long, but it is due to them—and to me," he added, after a pause.

Eleanor pushed paper and pens towards him, and said:

"You had better write the invitation."

Mr. Ferris felt that if she herself did so in her present mood, there was but little chance of the invitation being such as his mother would accept, and he was really anxious they should come to Woodside Manor to keep guard over Lady Thornbury during his unavoidable absence, especially since he dreaded any renewal of her old flirtations with Sir Cranford Wynne.

Truly, the course of his love did not run

smooth ; no sooner had he got rid of one rival than another appeared on the scene, and one, too, who to his ideas appeared far more formidable even than Charles Stafford.

So the letter was written "by the desire of his beloved Eleanor, who was conscious that his entreaties would be far more effectual than her own," and who was represented as being extremely anxious to improve her old acquaintance with Mrs. and Miss Ferris.

Maude having finished her task, thought it might be as well to allow her two companions if possible, an opportunity of coming to a better understanding over the invitation of the proposed visitors ; and the door had scarcely closed after her when Mr. Ferris seized the occasion of making an earnest and almost touching appeal to the better nature of his betrothed.

"Eleanor!" he said, "have you no kind word or look even yet for your promised husband ? In all things, save one, you know it

is the happiness of my life to obey you. Surely you might afford me one of the tender words you bestow upon your little dog ! But instead of the most common attention, you treat me still with a studied contempt—an evident aversion, which you must be aware must lead to very strange surmises on the part of any visitor."

"Do you enjoy the prospect of matrimonial life after such an agreeable courtship ?" asked Eleanor. "I am sure you have no reason to complain of any want of civility on my part."

"Civility !—no, but it is just that which I complain of. Remember your promise—Eleanor, you promised that you would try to love me ; that you would forget all, and try only to remember the devoted love which has filled my heart for so long."

"Yours is a base, selfish, sordid love !" exclaimed Eleanor, roused to energy at last. "It is mere selfishness ; do not dare to pro-

fane the sacred name of love. I do not believe in it! No, it is not love which you feel for me, it is rather hate—mean, vindictive hate, which makes you seek to revenge on me now some fancied slight. When in the first moments of my surprise and terror, you extorted from me what you are pleased to consider a promise to love you; I vainly dreamt that your forbearance and considerate use of the fatal secret which you had become master of, might at least win my gratitude, and perhaps in time, even more. Now I consider that you have forfeited all claim to that promise, and have rendered it impossible for me to fulfil it. Now I warn you, all you have to look forward to is my scorn,—my hate. Do you know how a woman can hate? Do you know how miserable, it is in her power to make a man? You will know by and bye—too well, if you do not take warning beforehand.”

“There are means of taming a shrew,” re-



torted Mr. Ferris, whose temper gave way at last. "I do not fear you, Eleanor; I will run the risk, I doubt its being such a fearful one, my charming wife."

His strong arm drew her towards him, he kissed her repeatedly, in spite of her angry resistance, and left the room, leaving the unhappy Lady Thornbury chafing like a lioness behind the bars of her cage, and almost mad with anger and shame.

From that moment she appeared to become almost reckless; her last hope was gone, and a sullen despair took possession of her mind. Day after day, regardless of cold or rain, she galloped over the hills, riding with a heedlessness which gave the impression that she rather courted danger than avoided it. All her comfort now seemed to be in restless motion, and when quite exhausted she would sit for hours silent, gazing into the fire—her hands clasped tightly together.

It was in vain that Maude sought to rouse

her when she was in these moods. An abrupt monosyllable was all she could obtain at best; most frequently poor Maude's attempts were all in vain, and it was evident that her words were unheard as well as unheeded. At length she became seriously alarmed at Eleanor's state of mind as well as body, and feeling the responsibility of watching over her almost too painful, she suggested that her father and mother might perhaps be induced to come for a few days to Woodside, to fetch her, as they had already expressed a desire for her to return home.

Maude felt convinced that Eleanor's kind heart, though now, indeed, it seemed so changed, could not but feel an interest in Lucy Ferris, and it gave her, therefore, sincere pleasure to hear that the invitation had been accepted, and that the nineteenth, the day after the second dinner party, had been fixed upon for their arrival.

Mr. Ferris determined to remain one day

with them at Woodside Manor, possibly that he might see how his affianced bride was disposed to treat his mother and sister, and then he would leave them to make further acquaintance with each other.

Lady Thornbury caught eagerly at the thoughts of a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Ferne; in the present restless state of her mind she seized on every proposition that offered a change, no matter how slight it might be, in the dreary tenor of her life, and in spite of their eccentricities, she had a real regard for them; they had always been kind to her, and fond of her, and now poor Eleanor's wounded heart valued any affection, as it had never done in her days of light-hearted happiness.

"And Mrs. Brooks, too," she said, "I must have poor Sarah; I promised her long ago, that whenever I had a house of my own she should come and visit me in it; little did I think how that promise was to be fulfilled! She too will only see the fair outside. None

but you, Maude, and one other, know the misery within."

"Dearest Eleanor," said Maude, the tears gathering in her eyes, "would it not be better even now, to let Mr. Ferris do his worst, to bear the disgrace—the shame he dares to threaten you with? Surely, whatever it may be, it would be a far less evil—"

Maude spoke hesitatingly, for she had made many attempts to induce her cousin to take this view of the matter, and had always been even angrily repulsed.

She stopped, and Eleanor answered, coldly, "Maude, that is the only subject on which I have requested you not to speak to me. You know that my mind is made up on that point. You know I could not bear that—the scorn—the shame—the tales that man would raise against me! Oh, it would kill me, Maude; I sometimes think I shall not live long; sorrow such as mine wastes away stronger frames. No, I will go down to the grave with an untarnished name though with a broken heart."

Maude threw her arms around her, and sobbed as if her heart were breaking too, and Eleanor kissed her tenderly. Presently she resumed, in a totally different tone and manner :

“Maude, do you remember that thick old brown geography book of ours, that we used to read together before I went to school?”

“Yes, I remember it well. What makes you think of it now?”

“There were pictures in it,” continued Eleanor, in the same dreamy kind of way; “one of them made a great impression on me in those days. It was of an Indian woman burning herself upon her husband’s funeral pile, and the letter-press informed us that the surrounding figures were her friends and neighbours with tomtoms and various instruments of music, with which they tried to drown her dying screams. I hope you see the parallel.”

Maude was silent; she did not like that tone of Eleanor’s; it pained her deeply.

“Do you not see? You are dull, Maude! The beating of the tomtoms begins next Tuesday, when I have ‘the pleasure of my friends’ company at dinner at seven o’clock.’”

“Hush! Eleanor, hush! You break my heart! Oh! can nothing be done to save you?”

“Nothing,” said Eleanor, with a strange laugh; “it only remains for ‘the friends and neighbours’ to beat the tomtoms loud enough.”

How stately and beautiful Lady Thornbury looked as she received her guests on that Tuesday evening! The last vestiges of mourning were thrown aside, and in a rich blue silk, with Thornbury jewels glittering on her lovely neck and arms, various emotions tinging her cheek with a bloom to which it had long been a stranger, she moved amid the circle like a bright and dazzling vision.

Maude watched and wondered, and every now and then her cousin’s gay laugh struck

painfully on her ear; and as Lady Thornbury's spirits rose, or seemed to rise, to all their old brilliancy, Maude's sank, until, when Eleanor called her to the piano, to take part in one of their old duets, her voice almost broke down, and she had the greatest difficulty in sustaining it.

"Maude, do not fail me," whispered Eleanor, as they finished, amidst the applause of the company; "remember the tomtoms!"

Mr. Ferris watched her as the dragon watched the golden fruit; he never left her side. He appeared to take her forced gaiety entirely as a compliment to himself, and whenever he had an opportunity, contrived to insinuate as much; until at length Eleanor, whose irritation became almost frantic, flashed upon him a look of such intense scorn and hatred from her dark eyes, that in fear for what turn her anger might take, he left her for a while in peace; and thinking he might as well try what a little jealousy might do,

devoted himself for the rest of the evening to a flirtation with a fat little girl in pink tarlatan, who seemed in the height of felicity at having made a conquest of a gentleman with such superlatively beautiful whiskers.

The second dinner party passed off much as the first had done, and on the following day Mrs. Ferris and her daughter arrived. Lady Thornbury received her guests stiffly, and with an air of hauteur which distressed Maude, though she did not venture to speak of it to her cousin. She knew their presence at all at Woodside Manor at present must be extremely distasteful to Eleanor, who had never sought their society in the old days, and had been barely civil to them for the sake of the gay parties Mrs. Ferris gave occasionally.

It was not however in Eleanor's nature long to resist the gentle voice and winning ways of Lucy. And before the time of Mr. Ferris' departure had arrived, he had the



satisfaction of seeing that his darling sister was appreciated nearly as he could wish, and when he approached to say farewell to his promised bride, a far sweeter smile than he had ever seen on her face before rewarded his fervent "Thank you, Eleanor, for your goodness to my Lucy;" and he was emboldened by it to draw her aside for a moment and whisper, "Eleanor! have pity upon her, do not break her heart by letting her see that you do not love me!"

She nodded her head in reply as she caught sight of Lucy's sad pale face, gazing upon her brother with an expression of so much affection.

Mrs. Ferris was a kind-hearted merry little woman, not over polished perhaps, but possessed of many good qualities, worth far more than the superficial gloss which made many, far less estimable than herself, more sought after; and it was no punishment to Maude to devote herself to her entertainment, leaving

Lucy more especially to Lady Thornbury's care.

Maude judged wisely in this. The gentle invalid received all Eleanor's kindness with such loving gratitude, and repaid it with such warmth of affection, that she was quite captivated, and already began to look upon Lucy's friendship as the sweetest balm for her wounded heart.

"Is it not strange," she said to Maude one evening, when according to her custom she came to Eleanor's boudoir for half-an-hour's chat before retiring to rest, "Is it not strange that I could have felt thus for a sister of James Ferris!"


"For the sister of your intended husband, Eleanor! It makes me so happy."

Eleanor sighed.

"Oh, Maude!" she said, "I had a terrible trial to-day. She was tired and was lying on the sofa, and I took her some fruit and held it to her lips, and she caught my hand and

kissed it, and looked up straight into my eyes and said: 'Dearest Lady Thornbury, it gives me such happiness to think how much you must love James! You, who might have chosen so far higher—to be his wife! How blind we are in such matters, do you know I used to fancy you rather despised him.' Maude, I felt that I should have choked if I attempted to answer her. I gasped for breath, she must have seen something of my feelings, for she looked so keenly at me and said, 'My brother is peculiar, few people I think quite appreciate him; but I can easily imagine those who do, loving him deeply as you do.' I could not meet the look of her eyes, Maude; I bent down to kiss her and then left the room."

"She will be an angel of peace and love to you both, there must be some good in Mr. Ferris to attract such warm love from a girl of Lucy's character. Let us hope that by and bye you too, dear Eleanor, may learn to look upon him somewhat more favourably."



Eleanor shook her head.

"All of life's brightness is gone for me," she said, "the best I can ever hope for now is a dim and dreary twilight. Good night, Maude, I hope you do not find my mother-in-law a great bore?"

"Not at all, she is agreeable and amusing, and so proud and happy."

## CHAPTER VI.

"She said I am aweary—aweary,  
I would that I were dead!"

TENNYSON.

Who can imagine the pride of Mrs. Brooks' heart, when she announced to her friends and acquaintances in Norrington and Ashwell, that she had received a letter from Lady Thornbury, inviting her to Woodside Manor.

"Her ladyship did always say it wouldn't seem quite like home till she had me there; to be sure, poor dear, she've had a deal of trouble, and at first 'twasn't to be expected that she'd care to have anybody there, but now that she's got over her sorrow like, 'twill do her good to have a bit of company again.

Well, to be sure! only think of me going to stay with a ladyship! not but what I've always been used to gentlefolks, and know my place, and what to say to them, and they always likes to talk to me."

Mrs. Brooks was so enraptured with the beauties of Eleanor's home, with the fine rooms and splendid furniture; and in becoming acquainted with Mrs. Gale, and in comparing notes with her as to the different degrees of goodness of the various "missuses," they had ever had anything to do with; that for the first day or two she had little leisure to notice the altered looks of her darling. When she did do so, however, it was with a sharp pang of self-reproach.

"And to think that you were ill," she said, when admitted as usual for a chat with Lady Thornbury, for half an hour before she went down to dinner. "Only to think that you were ill, and I not know it!"

"But I am not ill, Sarah,—I am sad and out of spirits, it is true, but I am not ill."

“ You unhappy, dear lady ? why I thought you’d got over your trouble quite nicely, when you were down at Norrington, and you haven’t been grieving on ever since, to be sure ! ”

“ Ah, Sarah ! do you know I am going to be married again ? ”

Mrs. Brooks started and looked up quickly.

“ Is it true, then ? No ! it can’t be true what they say. ”

“ And what do they say, Sarah ? tell me everything you have heard, ” said Lady Thornbury, who was nervously anxious to find out what story had got abroad relative to her engagement with Mr. Ferris.

“ O, dear Miss Eleanor—Lady Thornbury, I mean. Mrs. Gale won’t say for certain, but the talk is among the servants, that you can’t get on no how without Mr. Ferris—that he’s the only man as can manage the property, and that he would have no hands with it unless you marry him—la ! there I’m quite ashamed to say the words ! as if you could ever think of such as he. ”

"Hush! Sarah—it is true—true that I am going to marry him."

Eleanor was silent, and Mrs. Brooks lifted up her hands and eyes in astonishment.

Eleanor, after a little pause, continued hurriedly:

"You can have no idea, Sarah, of the trouble an estate like mine is to manage. I could never understand anything about business, and Mr. Ferris is very clever, and understands the property so well."

"It's *they* women! Oh, I know it's *they* women! that sharp-faced Lucy and her old mother; only to think that they've took you in like this! O, Miss Eleanor, I would be above them if I were you! And only to think of the offers you might have had," and Mrs. Brooks burst into tears.

"It is not *the* women, Sarah—*they* have not taken me in."

Eleanor unwittingly laid a slight emphasis on the word, which Mrs. Brooks instantly detected.



"Is it that you have fallen in love with him, then? You did not like him in the old times, I know, and he has not grown handsomer nor better since then. Oh, my darling, what has come to you? Do you love him now you are Lady Thornbury? You hated him when you were Miss Leigh!"

"Sarah, do not let us say anything more on this subject," said Lady Thornbury, with all her old haughtiness. "I told you of my intentions because I thought you would feel hurt if you were left to learn them from others accidentally, not because I wanted your advice, still less because I required a lecture."

"Now, my darling, don't be angry," said Mrs. Brooks, "don't be angry with me, you know there's scarcely anything in the world that I love as I love you," her eyes still filled with tears, she went on, "remember, you said you were sad, and you look so—oh you are so changed! your bright smile is gone! I have not heard your old merry laugh once since I have been in the house—oh, my

---

darling will fade away and die before my eyes, and I can do nothing to help you ! nothing, if you will not tell me what it is that makes you unhappy."

" I cannot, Sarah ! I must not talk to you any more now ; I shall be better by and bye, and happier too, perhaps, when I am married ; forgive me for speaking angrily to you, I have many things to vex me, and you know my temper was never one of the best."

The astonishment of Mr. and Mrs. Ferne was unbounded when the news of Eleanor's engagement to Mr. Ferris reached their ears. For some time they refused to believe it, and insisted that Maude had made a mistake, however, when Eleanor's invitation arrived, in which she alluded to its being the last chance she should have for seeing them for so many months, Mrs. Ferne could maintain her incredulity no longer, and was obliged to gloss over the matter to her friends as well as she could.

"Poor dear Eleanor," she said to Mrs. Bolton "I have no doubt she finds the care of her great property almost overpowering—she never studied political economy, nor even domestic economy, though I often pointed out these great deficiencies in her education. I have always heard a high character of Mr. Ferris, and you may depend upon it, my dear Mrs. Bolton, that it is a decided case of true love."

"True love! true fiddlesticks," exclaimed Mrs. Bolton very irreverently. "My dear madam, listen to reason. Here's a poor young creature left a widow, with a fine property and a coronet besides, and plenty of men at her feet, and who does she choose? why a little lawyer, out of a country town! It's all very well for him, but you will never make me believe it is Lady Thornbury herself he cares for, and not Woodside Manor; and as for her, poor silly thing, she was never very much of it—not like my Arabella—I

defy any one to take in my Arabella. Depend upon it, that man has wheedled her and frightened her till she believes everything will go to rack and ruin if she doesn't give over the charge of it to this Ferris."

Mr. Ferne now joined in with "In my opinion my poor niece is suffering from great derangement of the nervous system, indeed I have my own suspicions, but of course I mention it only in the strictest confidence, that her mind may be a little affected."

"Oh, Mr. Ferne, you frighten me," said Mrs. Bolton, "but really I should not be surprised if you were right, when I think of the first Lady Thornbury."

"You will remember that this is merely a surmise of mine."

Mrs. Bolton nodded her head in a confidential manner and put her finger on her lips. "I am going myself to Woodside Manor in a few days, in fact as soon as the wind changes a little more to the west, and then I shall make investigations."

“Mr. Ferne’s penetrative ability is such that there can be no doubt he will discover at a glance, if there should be any reason to dread such a misfortune for our beloved niece,” added Mrs. Ferne, “but still I cling to my opinion, formed from a thorough knowledge and appreciation of Lady Thornbury’s character, that true love alone could induce her to form such a *mésalliance*.”

“But what does Maude say—surely she must know all about it, if any one does?” enquired Mrs. Bolton, who was determined to come to the rights of the matter as she called it; for it cannot be wondered at that Norrington and Ashwell had been in the greatest possible state of excitement since they had heard of the ‘splendid match’ Mr. Ferris was about to make—nothing so interesting, nothing so extraordinary had happened since the marriage of Eleanor Leigh herself.

Mrs. Ferne could only say that Maude had never mentioned the subject in her letters,

more than briefly to allude to the facts, so poor Mrs. Bolton's call was less successful than she could have wished; and after a little condolence from Mrs. Ferne upon her own troubles in the matter of Anna Fleetwood and the doctor, which ended, as usual, in a lamentation over the degeneracy of the present generation in the matter of falling in love, as well as in everything else, Mrs. Bolton took her departure.

On her uncle and aunt's arrival at Woodside Manor, Lady Thornbury exerted herself greatly to keep up her usual spirits before them. She had become pretty well accustomed by this time to the presence of Mrs. and Miss Ferris, and seldom allowed them to be any restraint upon her own enjoyment.

Maude still was Mrs. Ferris's kind and thoughtful companion, but the poor, gentle Lucy was left much alone; while Lady Thornbury took long and solitary rambles in

the park, or shut herself up in the solitude of her own boudoir.

It was impossible for Lucy Ferris to watch Eleanor's manner and her expressive countenance day by day, without seeing there the impress of some feeling very different from the happiness of one who loves, and knows that she is beloved in return. Lucy longed, but did not dare to ask Eleanor, why her brow was so sad, why her eyes looked dimmed by weeping. Maude she did venture to question, but in vain; all she could extract from her was an admission that it was possible that Eleanor's approaching wedding recalled her first marriage too painfully.

"We must only hope, Lucy, that if this marriage takes place, our dear Eleanor may recover her looks and spirits afterwards more easily than before."

"If this marriage takes place, Maude? What do you mean? Have you any doubts?"

"I have no doubt of the marriage taking place; but do not let us talk more; you are looking tired and worn. Have you not been out to-day?"

"No," replied Lucy, gently. "Eleanor said she would come back in time to drive me out in the pony carriage; but I suppose the walk was pleasanter than she expected, or she was detained."

"Were you out yesterday?" asked Maude, quickly.

"No, dear."

"Eleanor will be so vexed. Come, put on your hat at once, and I will drive you round the park; the pony carriage is waiting; I saw it when I came in with your mother some time ago. Eleanor has so much to think of just now."

"I know she has," replied Lucy; "and it does not really signify. But I should like a drive very much if you can spare the time, for my head is rather worse than usual."



The pony carriage was soon ready, and the fresh air revived poor Lucy, and freshened her pale cheeks. They drove on in silence; both hearts were full. In a distant part of the park, where the thick trees met overhead, and gave a gloomy shadow even in summer, they met Eleanor. She was walking slowly along, her head bent down, and an appearance of deep dejection, visible even in her figure, before they came near enough to see her face, on which the traces of tears were plain, though she hastily brushed them away as she saw the pony carriage approaching.

"I am so ashamed of myself, Lucy," she said; "but I am glad Maude has been more thoughtful."

"Eleanor, you look tired. Will you drive Lucy now, and let me walk back to the house?"

"I am tired now, I find," said Lady Thornbury, in a faint voice. "I have been walking longer than I intended."

Maude sprang out, assuring her cousin that she was not the least tired. Eleanor was really glad of the rest. Hour after hour had passed away unheeded, as she paced up and down under those fine old trees, Eleanor's favourite walk for some time; and there she had often given the reins to her fancy, and given herself up to long reveries, sad or bright, according to her mood.

Lucy looked at her every now and then, but the sad and somewhat stern countenance of her intended sister-in-law gave her no encouragement to speak; at last, however, she could bear the silence no longer, and said with a gentle pressure of the hand, "Dear Eleanor, if I might only know what grieves you, perhaps I might be of some use; remember the fable of the mouse and the lion. I always think it must be so delightful to be of some little use to anyone. I can do so little—but if I could—" The poor heart was full, and she could not finish the sentence.

Eleanor turned round rather impatiently, "Lucy, I have never complained to you ; I have never told you that I am unhappy ; do not ask me, I would not give you any pain if I could avoid it ; do not try to discover why I am sometimes out of spirits ; rest satisfied with my assurance that if it were possible for you to be of any use, I would tell you all, and claim your offered help. Meanwhile, all you can do for me is, to add your persuasions to mine, that your brother will agree to put off our marriage till the summer at all events, you know he insists upon its taking place soon after Easter, and—Lucy dear—I do so wish to wait—"

"But, Eleanor, surely he will do as you wish, if you have any good reason ; but what reason is there, dearest ? You have nothing to wait for, you know he loves you deeply, devotedly, you know he has loved you for years ; it is not as if you could fancy it might be possible for him to change. No, you must

know him too well for that ! and if you love him as much—? Oh, Eleanor, what is the matter ?” she exclaimed, for the sudden change of countenance, the flash of contempt from the dark eyes of her companion, could not be mistaken by the sensitive, and already apprehensive Lucy.

“Eleanor, you do not love him ! Oh, my poor brother ; speak, Eleanor, one word—tell me the truth—you *must* tell me the truth—I ask you by all the affection you have expressed for me—by all that you hold most sacred, do you *love* my brother ?”

“Lucy, Lucy, do not be so impetuous !” said Lady Thornbury, frightened to find that Lucy had been more observing than she expected, “do not catechise me in this way ; have I not promised to be your brother’s wife, and is not that fact a sufficient answer to your question ?” She tried to smile, but her attempted playfulness was unheeded by the anxious sister.

“It might *once* have been a sufficient answer, but not *now*—not now. I have seen many things, I have guessed more ; Maude I can get nothing from, and now you will not answer me ; you equivocate, Eleanor—once more I ask you, do you love my brother ? do you love the man you have promised to marry ?”

“I have warned you, Lucy. I have tried all I could to spare you. But if you *insist* upon it, you shall know the truth ; I do *not* love your brother ; I shall never love him. You know him well, I need not tell you that his will is strong—stronger than mine ; and though I have struggled, and shall struggle till the last to escape, I feel that it is my fate to be his wife.”

She looked round at Lucy as she spoke, half fearing the effect of her words upon the fragile being at her side. Lucy lay back in the carriage, white as marble ; her face looked sunk and pinched, like that of one who had

received a severe shock ; and Eleanor, greatly alarmed, gave her spirited pony a sharp cut with the whip, and he bounded forward at a rate which promised a speedy arrival at Woodside Manor.

Lucy, however, unclosed her eyes in a minute or two, and said in a strangely altered tone, "Drive slowly, Eleanor, I must know the whole now. What is the meaning of it all? How shall you *dare* stand before the altar, and take false vows in the presence of God and man? have you thought of this?"

"Have I *not* thought of it, Lucy, day and night; have I not thought of everything, till I have no sleep at night, no rest by day?—believe me that your brother has obtained such fatal power over me, that the least of the evils that threaten me, is, that I should become his wife."

"And would you be safe then from the evils you speak of?" asked Lucy, coldly.

Eleanor noticed the change of voice and manner, and blushed deeply as she replied—

"It is true, I should be safe in that case."

"I see—it is a bargain then—and my brother will have the worst of it; a hand without a heart. O, my poor James, how can he be so infatuated? but it may not yet be too late—it shall not be if his sister can warn him—if she has any influence at all with him. Mamma, mamma! there is mamma, let me go to her."

"No, I shall take you safe home; you are not fit to walk now. But once more let me warn you not to mention the sorrowful secret you have discovered; it can do no good, it can only increase my misery; it can only cause the history of your brother's marriage to become more widely known, and I warn you that it would not be to his credit."

Poor Lucy put her hand to her head, and as Eleanor stopped at the door, she was lifted out of the carriage almost fainting, and carried up to her own room.

Lady Thornbury pitied the anguish she

knew she must be suffering, both of mind and body : but at the same time she felt a good deal irritated with her for naturally taking her brother's part, forgetting that she knew only one half of the story. It was, therefore, with some satisfaction that the next morning she heard from Mrs. Ferris, that she considered the air of Woodside Manor did not suit Lucy; she had been so ill all night that she had determined to take her home at once, to put her under the care of her own medical man.

Eleanor was indeed shocked to see the alteration which one night had made in the appearance of her guest, and it was with almost a pang of self-reproach that she greeted her, when she came down stairs at a later hour than usual. Eleanor arranged the cushions for her as she liked them best, and tried by every little kindness and attention to atone for the wound she had inflicted on that tender heart; but all was in vain, until she whispered—

“ If anything could make me think better



of your brother, dear Lucy, it would be the great love which you have for him."

Lucy put her arms round Lady Thornbury's neck, and drew down her face to hers.

"Oh, Eleanor, he is so kind, his love is so deep, so true, so thoughtful; you must love him if you knew him well. Only try, dearest, he has loved you for so many years; let him win a little love in return. If you only knew what he felt that night when you rejected him—that night at our ball—you would have pitied him then; you must have felt a little for him."

The entrance of Mrs. Ferris put a stop to the conversation. She did not know anything of the under current of feeling in the heart of those two, and she supposed naturally that the grief visible on the countenances of both, proceeded from the thoughts of the approaching separation; so she tried to cheer up their spirits a little by reminding them that they would soon meet again, when they would be-

come sisters in reality, as they were now in heart and affection; how much this speech jarred upon the feelings of both may be easily imagined.

Lady Thornbury said she would now leave Lucy to her mother's care, and to the rest which she evidently required, and shortly afterwards left the room.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Looks it not like the King?"

HAMLET.

LUCY lost no time after her return home, as soon as she recovered from the fatigue of the journey, in asking her brother the true history of his engagement to Lady Thornbury. Mr. Ferris at first appeared very indignant that his wishes had been so far disregarded as to allow Lucy to discover that all did not go smoothly.

"She promised me," he said, "or at least she implied a promise, which ought to have been the same thing, that my poor Lucy should be spared the pain of knowing that my

lovely bride was sometimes induced to be rebellious. Never mind, Lucy, do not trouble your dear little head about such matters—you cannot understand them.”

Lucy looked up indignantly.


“James—James!” she said. “I can understand them but too well; I can feel for you both from the very depths of my heart. I can feel what misery she must endure—poor Eleanor! whose lot I have been so often tempted to envy—she! to be bound in some mysterious way to marry a man she does not love. James, her proud spirit will break, she will not live to be your wife—she is fading away, I can plainly see.”

“No, no, Lucy, do not attempt to alarm me in this way. I have watched Eleanor well, and I understand her character; she will try to put me off to the last, if possible, but when she finds the thing is inevitable, she will yield gracefully. She would not parade her dislike to her husband in the eyes of the world for

her own sake, and when once my wife, she shall learn to love me. Is that so difficult, Lucy?"

"I used to think it was not," replied Lucy, her eyes filling with tears, "but now if you are so hard—so exacting—Oh, James! for your own sake give her back her liberty. You will not tell me what unlucky chance has given you this strange power over her fate, but whatever it may be—be generous—be noble—as I have ever believed you to be. Ah! James, who can tell, perhaps you may yet win from her gratitude the love that she now denies you."

A bright light shone for an instant in James Ferris's eyes—for one moment only, and then died away, the better feelings of his nature yielded once more to the fear of losing the prize he had sacrificed so much to obtain. For one moment the soft vision presented itself of Eleanor as a willing, loving bride, but the reflection that he had already made her suffer



too much for that ever to be possible drove away the thought.

Lucy's quick eye saw the transient change, and she half flattered herself that she had succeeded.

"Dear James," she continued, gaining courage as she went on; "I see you are wavering. Think what it would be to you to lead a poor woman to the altar against her wish—her whole heart revolting at your tyranny—her whole soul roused to resist you with all the powers of her nature, if, indeed, that poor heart does not break in the struggle. O! why will you not be generous, before it is too late? release her; it will be painful to yourself, I know well; but overcome yourself, my dear brother—be yourself again—your own noble self!"

Lucy had risen, and thrown her arms round him, the tears streamed down her cheeks, and her fragile form shook violently with the intensity of her emotion.

James Ferris unclasped the arms that rested on his shoulders ; he did so gently, however, and there was no appearance of anger in his manner as he answered :

“ No, Lucy, do not ask me, it cannot be ; such high flown notions are beyond me. I have bought her—you do not know at what a sacrifice I have bought her, and mine she shall be. Lucy, I am not strong enough to give up this prize. All my life I have loved her—long, it is true, without the faintest shadow of hope, and now—now that a happy chance has enabled me to gain her hand, you cannot possibly expect me to be such a fool as to give up the advantage I have gained. No, Lucy, you must not speak to me again in this way. I have borne it now because you are a good girl, and I love you ; but I must tell you once for all, that I will hear nothing more on the subject. Wipe your eyes, like a good sister, and go and settle your bridesmaid’s dress, for it will soon be required.”

He left the room, and poor Lucy had the painful task of writing to tell Lady Thornbury that she had been unable even to obtain a promise of delay, which she had flattered herself would be a task of no difficulty.

It was no wonder that during this dreary time Eleanor's step grew slow and sad, that her eye lost its brilliancy, and her cheek its wonted bloom. There were still, however, hours when the old liveliness of her nature re-asserted itself; and how gladly Maude hailed such a return of brightness, transient as it was.

To Mrs. Croft's unobservant eyes every change was easily attributed to the lingering effects of her illness, and she often lamented that much of the strength she had gained at Greenrigg, should have been lost again at Woodside Manor.

The greatest solace of Eleanor's weary hours at this time was music, and much of her leisure was spent at the piano, where Maude



often found her in tears over some old song which she had loved in happier days. Amongst these, "Auld Robin Gray," was one of the favorites which Eleanor sung with such pathos, such an intensity of expression, that Maude could seldom restrain her own tears at the conclusion.

"Dearest Eleanor, I wish you would not sing that song, it is too much for you," Maude ventured to remark one evening, as Eleanor's faltering voice died away at the concluding notes, "or at least try this, as something of a restorative afterwards," and she hunted out "The Psalm of Life," from a pile of music.

Eleanor shook her head. "Let me sing my old friends, Maude, that one is too high-toned for me, too stern, my heart is more in tune for poor Jeanie's sorrows. Ah!" she said, suddenly starting up, "what noise is that? I am become so nervous now that the least thing startles me. Hush! Maude, lis-

ten!" her widely dilated eyes were fixed upon the door with a strange expression of terror in them.

Maude, too, had started up at the same sounds, but she quickly sat down again, feeling that she must not trust her trembling limbs. Both had in that moment caught the sound of a voice, too well remembered by both, but which they had never thought to hear again. The room swam round, the lights danced vaguely in Eleanor's eyes, and she would have fallen upon the floor but for a strong arm that caught her.

"Lady Thornbury! Eleanor! Oh, I have been too rash, too thoughtless! Miss Ferne what shall I do? Have I killed her? Oh, Eleanor, look up!"

It was Charles Stafford who spoke, it was Charles Stafford whose arms bore Lady Thornbury to the sofa—who hung over her with such anxious care.

And Maude? Maude's slight frame quivered

like a reed, but she nerved it with an iron will. Mr. Stafford thought not of her, all his care, all his anxiety was for Eleanor! But, what then, she had never dreamed that it could be otherwise; yet, the thought was bitter—bitter even then, in that moment of happiness—for it was great, overwhelming happiness to see him again; him whom she had mourned as dead.

She quickly was at Eleanor's side, sprinkled some Eau de Cologne on her temples, and in a few moments she opened her eyes.

"Mr. Stafford," Maude whispered, "will you stand out of sight for a moment? She has been ill, and the sudden surprise, the happy surprise of seeing you again, after we had mourned you as dead, has been too much for her; she is not strong."

"And you, dear Miss Ferne?" he asked, taking both her hands in his, and remembering with shame how utterly he had forgotten her in the first sight of his old love; "how

kind you have been, how unselfish ; you have not forgotten your correspondent ?”

Eleanor held out her hand to Mr. Stafford. “ I am better,” she said ; “ tell us, how did you escape in that fearful storm ?”

“ It was indeed a fearful time,” he replied, shuddering, “ some day I must give you the history, but not now. Just as I was sinking, and my strength was almost gone, I was picked up and taken into the boat. I only landed yesterday, and could not deny myself the pleasure of coming here immediately. I would not even wait till a letter had prepared you for my appearance ; which I am aware I ought to have done.”

How happily that evening passed away ! For a few hours Eleanor forgot all but the happiness of being once more in Charles Stafford’s society, so that even Maude was surprised at her gaiety and sprightliness of manner.

“ Mr. Stafford,” she said, “ you will not

leave us? We cannot afford to lose old and valued friends when they are thus unexpectedly restored to us."

"Thanks, Lady Thornbury; I will gratefully accept your kindness. Do not think me such a heartless brother, Miss Ferne," he added, in reply perhaps to a little look of astonishment, visible for a moment in Maude's face; "my sister and her family are now on the Continent, and are not likely, according to their arrangements, to return home for two or three weeks. I am in great hopes that letters of mine would reach them as soon as the intelligence of the shipwreck; so I may indulge myself with a few days at Woodside Manor."

"Oh happy hours of golden prime,  
And affluence of love and time."

E'en as a miser counts his gold, did Lady Thornbury count those days—those bright happy days.

The first frosts had come, and had tinged the woodlands with bright hues of brown and yellow; and purple mists lay between the dark masses of trees, and softened the outlines they did not hide. Never did the park appear so beautiful to Eleanor as now, when she pointed out each lovely view to Charles Stafford.

It was two or three days after his arrival before Mr. Stafford had any opportunity of a confidential talk with Maude. A letter from Mr. Ferris, half business-like, half lover-like, had arrived that morning, and cast a perceptible gloom over Lady Thornbury's spirits; he wrote, requesting certain papers might be sent to him, and she had retired to her own room to look for these papers, and to frame, as best she might, an answer to the unwelcome despatch.

"Miss Ferne," said Charles Stafford, who did not know how to get rid of Mrs. Crofts, who, it must be confessed, being rather obtuse in her perceptions was very often in the way,

“Miss Ferne, let this bright sunshine tempt you out this morning; let me persuade you to take a turn on the terrace until Lady Thornbury has finished her letters.”

Maude gladly acquiesced, and a few minutes afterwards she joined him on the terrace. Time was precious, yet too many thoughts were filling the hearts of both to allow of either feeling quite at their ease.

At last, feeling the silence oppressive, Charles Stafford began, in an underhand manner it must be allowed, to approach the subject of which his heart was full.

“I think, Miss Ferne, you told me that Lady Thornbury had been seriously ill lately?”

“She has, indeed; for some days we feared she would not recover.”

“It must have been a very anxious time for you.”

“It was, indeed,” replied Maude, with a sigh over the remembrance.

“Did not you hear of the shipwreck

about that time, while you were in Cumberland?"

"Yes, it was only the evening before Lady Thornbury was taken ill, that we read it in the *Times*."

"Do you think the sudden shock—I mean, do you think she had at all looked forward to—to—" he stopped, and Maude pitied his confusion and gave him a helping hand.

"To your coming home? I can scarcely say. I believe she thought it possible you might do so."

"And she was grieved at hearing of my death; did it trouble her much?"

"O! Mr. Stafford, certainly it was a great sorrow to us both, to all your friends."

"Dear Miss Ferne," he said, suddenly stopping and taking her hand, "you have ever been my friend, my truest, best friend; tell me, am I doing right in staying here? or am I only preparing future pain for her as well as for myself? I had fancied, from



various things I had heard, that her love for Lord Thornbury was not of that depth and intensity that all her young life would be blighted by his loss. Forgive me for saying this, if I have been misinformed. But I had dared to dream that in time, perhaps—in short, what did she mean when she sent me that message in the last letter I received from you? Need I tell you that those few words have brought me home.”

Maude had feared as much; it was what she had been telling herself must come; ever since Lord Thornbury's death she had tried to realize this to herself, but nevertheless it was hard to bear. It was difficult to know what to say in reply.

Charles Stafford saw her hesitation, but did not of course attribute it to its true cause.

“I know what you will say, you will tell me that all I wish to learn I should ask of herself. It is true; but many things perplex me. That first evening I arrived, how gay,

how bright she was! I fancied she was even happy, and that the remembrance of those old happy days was as vividly present to her mind as it was to my own; but all that brightness had vanished the next morning, and there has been scarcely a glimpse of it since. And this morning, did you observe her after she had read her letters? I watch her closely, you see," he added, smilingly; "what a worn and anxious look settled on her face; I even saw her lips compressed tightly together, as if some sudden and sharp pang had struck at her very heart. She is ill and suffering, that I can plainly discover for myself; but whether in mind or body, I know not—and here I ask your help—is it sorrow for Lord Thornbury's death that still preys upon her mind?"

Maude had gained a little time to arrange her thoughts, and she was able to answer now in a steady voice.

"Eleanor's illness was very severe, and she has not yet regained her usual strength; she

has besides had many trials and anxieties in business matters."

"And her husband—you do not think she is all this while grieving for him?"

"No," replied Maude, "I do not think so. His death, happening so suddenly as it did, gave her without doubt a great shock; but their married life was not very happy, as you seem to have heard already."

"Thanks, dear Miss Ferne, a thousand times. You are always my comforter, what could I have done without you all those dreary months! I have all your dear letters treasured up; they with a few other of my most valued possessions, were saved from the wreck; how many a time the kind, sympathizing words have cheered and strengthened me."

"My letters were dear, because they told him of her," sighed Maude to herself.

With a sudden resolution she raised her head, and said—

"Mr. Stafford, Eleanor, as you know, has

ever been as a dear sister to me; and you—you have given me a sister's place. I would do anything, everything for the happiness of both; but will you believe me when I say that I believe it would not be for her happiness that she should learn that your feelings for her are unchanged."

"What do you mean? What can you mean?"

"Do not ask me more," she replied, with such sadness, that he was struck by it, and looked so earnestly at her for a moment, that her eyes fell, and a soft colour rose to her cheek.

"O, Maude, you have given me the cup of hope with one hand, and with the other you dash it away! What is this mystery? can it be that she loves another?"

"No; O, no; but I believe she intends never to marry again."

Charles Stafford laughed a gay laugh, which was but little in accordance with poor Maude's feelings at that moment.

“If that is all,” he said, “I shall not leave Woodside Manor to-morrow, as I had nearly determined to do. Patience, patience, I will bide my time.”

“What are you two so merry about?” said Lady Thornbury, as she threw open the glass door of the breakfast-room, and advanced to meet them.

Maude felt uncomfortable; she did not know what to make of the keen, somewhat displeased glance, which looked interrogatively from one to the other.

“I have finished my letters, and shall be ready to ride with you after luncheon.”

Mr. Stafford, whose handsome countenance was radiant with the bright hopes, which, in spite of all poor Maude’s caution, she had not been able to over-cloud, said gaily—

“Are you aware, Lady Thornbury, what a spy you have had over you? Are you aware that I have had histories of all your proceedings since I left England?”

She blushed painfully, and he remembered,

too late, how humiliating some of the recollections his words had awakened, must be to her.

"You are good, to have taken such interest in one so unworthy," she said, in a faint, low voice, which was intended to reach his ear alone.

"Of all the letters I received from my kind correspondent," he continued in the same tone, "the most welcome was the last. You do not ask me why it was more welcome to me than any of its predecessors," he continued after a minute's silence. "It was because it contained a message from yourself."

She looked down, and trembled violently. How well she remembered the day on which she had given that message to Maude, and the thoughts which had filled her mind as she had watched Maude's rapid pen tracing the words, which she felt but too truly had brought back this true heart to her feet once more.

"Lady Thornbury, do you remember those

words? 'Tell him,' you said, 'if anything should tempt him to England again, that he must not forget his old friends; that they will be glad to see him.' You are not sorry to see me now, Lady Thornbury? You allow me to look upon you as one of my friends?"

She was so much agitated that Charles Stafford felt alarmed, and feared to risk all by any premature allusion to the object of his return to England, and he continued in a louder voice, to give her time to recover herself:—

"I scarcely think it likely that I shall return to Barbadoes. I believe I shall soon have the offer of an equally good appointment in England, or the Mediterranean, which would suit me better in every respect."

A conversation on Barbadoes followed, in which all three joined, feeling it a relief when the luncheon bell summoned them back to the house.

During the days that followed, Charles

Stafford watched Eleanor with the keenest interest, his hopes sometimes growing bright and strong as he noticed her evident pleasure in his society, the interest with which she listened to his accounts of his life in Barbadoos, and shall it be added? the only half suppressed irritation when it appeared that Maude engrossed too much of his attention. On the other hand, her very variable spirits, the fits of deep depression which seemed to overwhelm her at times, and the extreme care with which after that one morning she contrived to avoid every chance of a *tête-à-tête*, filled him with anxiety. From Miss Ferne he could learn nothing more, her entreaty was "wait, only wait, it is possible, even yet, that all may be as you wish, but do not hope too much."

"It is of no use telling you not to hope at all," she said with a sad smile, "for I know well enough that would be but a waste of words. You men are always too much accustomed to think that every obstacle must yield



to your wishes, or at all events, to your energy and will."

"Then there is an obstacle? you admit that?"

"Alas, I cannot deny it," said Maude, "and one that I fear even you will not be able to overcome."

"And you will not tell me more?"

"I cannot, I must not; Eleanor alone can tell you all, but I entreat you do not ask her,—wait."

"But how long am I to wait?"

"I cannot tell you—not long perhaps. I wish, cruel as it may seem to you, that your patience might have a long trial; but my poor Eleanor! oh leave her in peace a little while, she has had so much trouble."

"And you think I should cause her more trouble," said Charles mournfully, "I, who would give up all my hopes of happiness, if I could secure hers by so doing!"

"I believe yours are not empty words," said Maude, with a bright flash from her soft

grey eyes. "I believe yours is a true love, which would seek her welfare before your own, and you can trust me? you know enough of your second sister to trust her?"

"Entirely, and I will put myself in your hands; I will be guided by you—only forgive me if now and then I am a little impatient."

Lady Thornbury's old affection for Charles Stafford required but little encouragement to start up into new life: perhaps the absence of any particular devotion on his part, only increased the anxiety she felt to know whether she still retained her old place in his heart. At first she had felt well satisfied that it was so—latterly she had begun to doubt, and that doubt had brought her such misery, that in spite of all her perplexities, in spite of her promise to Mr. Ferris, which weighed like a nightmare on her mind, she felt sometimes that all would be clear—all would somehow become easier to bear, if she could but feel assured that she was still dear to him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

The chain is broke that bound us then,  
When shall I find its like again?

MOULTRE.

THE pleasant coterie was however destined to be disturbed by the arrival of Mr. Ferris, whose return to Woodside Manor was as unwelcome as it was unexpected; and his reappearance there just now excited Lady Thornbury's suspicions, and consequently her indignation, that some kind of espionage had been established to watch her proceedings.

But however this may have been, one afternoon, as the three ladies were sitting at work in the drawing-room, and Charles Stafford was reading aloud to them "The Woman in

White," in which they were so absorbed that the usual sounds of warning had passed unnoticed, the door opened, and Mr. Ferris entered the room with the air of one who had a perfect right to find himself within those walls.

The appearance of Count Fosco himself would scarcely have startled them more, or have proved more unwelcome, and Lady Thornbury met him with a frigidity of manner which must have considerably damped his enthusiasm as a lover.

He expressed great surprise at finding Mr. Stafford among the party, and proceeded to inquire when he had reached England, and whether he had finally abandoned his appointment in Barbadoes? inquiries which Charles answered with his usual suavity of manner, at the same time giving as little information as possible respecting his future intentions; being content, as he said, with his present pleasant quarters, and not caring for much beyond.

Maude tried to hide the stiffness of her cousin's manner by a more courteous reception, being even more apprehensive than Eleanor herself of angering one who had, by an unlucky chance, obtained such power; and she had at a glance detected the indignant flush which mounted in Mr. Ferris's face as he perceived his first rival on his entrance to the room—although it was but momentary.

Mrs. Crofts, in her happy state of ignorance as to the real state of affairs, and the relative position in which the different parties respectively stood, seemed really pleased with the addition of another gentleman to the circle, and afterwards confided to Maude that she felt it would relieve them of much awkwardness, as now the two gentlemen would be able to take care of each other all the morning, and consequently would not engross so much of their time as one alone must necessarily do.

The reading was of course at an end for the

present, and all remembrance of the tale which had so strangely interested them, seemed to have vanished with the present cloud, which had so unexpectedly shed its dark influence over them all. But the appearance of the usual five o'clock tea restored the party to greater sociability.

Maude could not resist entreating Eleanor, before they came into the drawing-room for dinner, to be very guarded in her conduct towards both Mr. Ferris and Charles Stafford, as it would require the most delicate steering on Eleanor's part to avoid a collision between her lovers, although neither was as yet acknowledged in this light. It was true that Stafford's love was but rarely allowed to appear on the surface, lying as it did in the very depths of his heart, where it has dwelt unshaken for so many months; still Mr. Ferris was perfectly aware of the engagement which had once existed between him and Lady Thornbury, and he resolved to watch events

very narrowly, lest the golden prize which he had thought himself secure of, should even yet escape him.

Who does not know the thousand little ways in which love is betrayed without a single word, but which is only too perceptible to the eyes of jealousy.

Much of Charles Stafford's conversation and attention were, however, directed to Maude, which in a measure puzzled Mr. Ferris; and her evident pleasure in his society, coupled with Lady Thornbury's extremely guarded manner, at times almost disarmed all his suspicions. Men are so much more easily deceived in regard to the matters of the heart, than women, who from being so constantly obliged to restrain their warmest feelings, have them under more complete command when called upon to exercise reserve in greater matters; secrecy being a natural gift to the weaker sex, where their own affections are concerned. Does any one doubt this? go and

watch the numerous flirtations in a ball-room: in all probability each woman's heart there has its own secret romance, and a feeling of perfect indifference to those partners with whom they are talking and laughing so merrily, and yet these men will imagine they have effected a conquest! and perhaps smile at the ease with which they have done so, but what would society be if the history of each heart were written on each brow! It is indeed well for the world in general that the deepest feelings shun the light of day and are buried so carefully that their treasures can only be disclosed in solitude. But to return to the game of chess going on at Woodside.

To all outward appearances the two opposition knights were too far removed to clash with each other, and the two Queens on the board escaped any decided check upon their movements.

The surface of the current had thus gone



on smoothly for some days, though Maude had marked with pain a degree of coldness in Eleanor's manner towards herself so foreign to her usual manifestations of warm affection, but she attributed it to the embarrassment of her present position, so she only shewed her perception of the alteration by increased attentions and acts of kindness to her cousin until a day or two after Mr. Ferris's arrival, when the flame fairly burst forth.

All the party had started together for a short stroll through a plantation leading to one of the gamekeeper's lodges, as Lady Thornbury was anxious to enquire for a poor child who had been sadly burnt the previous day, and it furnished an object for the morning's walk.

Mr. Ferris had contrived to get his business finished in time to join them, and Charles Stafford, on perceiving the lawyer's determination to monopolize Lady Thornbury as his companion, at once offered his arm to Maude,

and by degrees they found themselves considerably behind the rest of the party.

Mr. Stafford was relating some scenes of his life in Barbadoes, and grew eager and animated in the sketches which followed rapidly in succession, and every word of which fell on a most interested and attentive listener, little dreaming how closely she was watched by Eleanor as she occasionally turned round on the plea of pointing out something worthy of notice in the distant landscapes to her companions, for she had taken care to get Mrs. Crofts to walk with her, in order to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Ferris.

The latter happened at length to remark on the lingering couple in the background, as he had not failed to detect the keen glance which Eleanor always directed towards them as she turned, and he took good care not to dwell long enough on the view pointed out to him, to enable them to overtake his division of the party, having been by this time almost blinded

into the belief that Mr. Stafford had seen the utter hopelessness of the case, and so had been won round by Maude's kind sympathy into transferring his affections to her. He could not understand the existence of such a warm fraternal affection between two young people in their position, who were in no way related to each other; and the inuendoes by which he had attracted Lady Thornbury's attention to the fact of their great and increasing intimacy, put the spark to the smouldering feelings of jealousy, which had displayed itself at times for some days past.

The foremost trio at length reached the keeper's lodge, but Eleanor felt too angry and excited to go in; she merely knocked at the door, when the mother of the unfortunate child came out, and gave a most circumstantial account of the accident. Eleanor managed to appear an interested listener, but her thoughts were very differently engaged, and

it was well for the poor little sufferer that Mrs. Crofts gathered more of the tale—enabling her to suggest the best mode of sending some relief to it afterwards, when Eleanor felt quite ashamed to remember how little of the long story told by the child's mother had remained in her memory.

The history of the accident was nearly finished before the loiterers came up, and it was with a flushed cheek and haughty air that Eleanor recognised the addition to her party by a look, not daring to trust herself to speak to either of them. But when the woman had finished talking, and Mrs. Crofts had promised to take something to the little sufferer in the afternoon, they all turned in the homeward direction, and Maude, in her perfect ignorance of Eleanor's irritation, made some remark upon the speed with which the advanced trio had reached the cottage.

Eleanor could not resist saying :

“ You should say rather that you and Mr.

Stafford were so wrapped up in yourselves and your conversation, that you preferred your own society to ours, Maude, or you would not have kept so far behind," and her face crimsoned as she spoke. .

"Oh, Eleanor, I had no idea you had set your mind upon our all walking together, but we can do so going home."

"Not on any account, Maude," returned Eleanor haughtily. "Mr. Ferris quite agrees with me that it would be a great pity to interrupt such an interesting and animated conversation; so pray do not think of spoiling your walk by joining us; I would not for the world be a marplot."

Stafford felt sorry that Eleanor should have so openly displayed her annoyance, which he attributed to his own thoughtlessness in having left her so much in the society of one, whom all knew, she only tolerated, and did not like, and he blamed himself accordingly. He was also sorry for Maude; she was certainly quite

undeserving of this outpouring of anger, and he could not but admire the perfect calmness and gentleness with which she bore it. With the superior wisdom of a man, he kept silence, but contrived that the parties should not again separate, by entering into general conversation until they reached home, by which time Lady Thornbury had bitterly repented her hasty words, as being beneath her dignity, but she still could not avoid betraying her annoyance in many little ways.

Mrs. Crofts, indeed, seemed the only unruffled one amongst them, as Mr. Ferris could not misunderstand the indirect slight towards himself exhibited in Eleanor's discontent with the arrangement of the walking party, and he showed his appreciation of the same by a moody silence.

Maude, who could endure anything rather than misunderstandings with anyone, least of all, with one whom she almost regarded as a sister, so close had the ties become which

bound their cousinly friendship, followed Eleanor to her room on their arrival at home, and without any further prelude, begged to know what was the cause of offence between them, as it was now too evident that something had arisen to mar the brightness of their intercourse.

"Look in your own heart, Maude, as that will answer your question far more satisfactorily than any words of mine can do," was Eleanor's rather enigmatical reply, uttered in such a freezing tone of voice, that Maude was greatly disturbed.

"Dear Eleanor," she said, "pray do not adopt such a Lady Thornbury style of speaking to your own truest friend and cousin, but tell me in what I have offended you. I feel sure there must be some misapprehension, which a few words may set to rights; at all events, tell me what it is."

"There may have been misunderstandings between us, Maude; but that is at an end, as

there is no longer any mistake on the subject ; but I think it would have been but kind in you, and no more than I had a right to expect, if you had given me a hint of Mr. Stafford's fickleness, before my attention was so openly called to it this morning, and by Mr. Ferris, too !”

“ What do you mean ? what can you mean, Eleanor ? surely there is no harm in my talking or listening to Mr. Stafford, when you are otherwise engaged !”

“ Oh, no ! no harm in the least ; especially when it seems such a source of delight to both of you.”

“ Now you are positively unjust as well as unkind !” exclaimed Maude, “ and all I can say is, if you wish me to return to Oak Cottage to-morrow, I am quite ready and willing to do so ; but I will not, either by word or manner, forbid Mr. Stafford from talking as much as he likes to me ; and I do consider it rather despotic in you, Eleanor, to allow him no friendship for anyone but yourself.”




“Friendship! yes, Maude,” replied her cousin, who was rather surprised at Maude’s energy of manner, “but you must confess that friendship and love are totally different things, and I am no longer to be blinded by pretences of sisterly friendship. There are limits even to my credulity,” she added bitterly, as an angry tear started in her eye.

Maude could not help feeling extremely indignant at the crowd of insinuations which her cousin’s words, tones and gestures, conveyed to her mind; but with her usual quiet self-command, she replied—

“Yes, Eleanor, I am not at all ashamed to think that Charles Stafford loves me as a sister, or that I value him as a much esteemed and most worthy brother.”

She carefully repressed many thoughts which rose unbidden to her mind, not wishing to wound her cousin’s feelings in any way; and her voice was so calm, and her manner so composed, and her gaze so unflinching as Eleanor strove to read the real truth in her



eyes, that Lady Thornbury felt quite ashamed at having for one moment doubted her sincerity. She also repented of her own impetuosity towards her, and memories of her devotion and perfect unselfishness came crowding in her mind, and aided to restore her usual generosity of temper.

“Maude, dear Maude!” she replied “how good you are! you really do deserve the whole heart of such a man as Charles Stafford far more than I do, or ever have done I fear; but when you remember that in spite of all my contradictory actions; actions I soon learnt most bitterly to lament, my heart has been really given to him, and him alone, you will forgive my feeling some degree of pique, at being as I fancied, thrown aside as a broken toy, and as quickly replaced.”

Maude might have reminded her that few hearts amongst mankind in general would have remained so firm and constant as Stafford's had done, but she forbore, and only replied,

“Dear Eleanor, let us understand each other perfectly, and once for all—I have been too well aware that constancy and fixed resolve of purpose must form prominent traits in so noble a character as Mr. Stafford’s, ever since my acquaintance with him, ever to dream of any probability of the transfer of his deepest feelings; but surely the heart which is most true in its love is the most open to friendship, more especially when, as you know, that friendship had its origin in connection with its love—and spite of all the world may say,” added Maude, with a glow of enthusiasm lighting up her whole face as she spoke, “it is quite possible for a warm feeling of affection to subsist between man and woman, quite different in its nature, and equally independent of what is usually termed love. Such is the bond which unites me to Charles Stafford, who is still as truly yours in heart and soul as he ever was:—are you content now, dear Eleanor?”

The young widow's beautiful eyes were now filled with tears of mingled shame and admiration of her cousin ; she threw her arms around her neck and kissed her affectionately, imploring her forgiveness for those demonstrations of jealousy and unkind, unjust suspicions ; a pardon which was easily granted by Maude, with assurances that she should remember them no more, and that she was quite happy in thinking the atmosphere would be more effectually cleared by the mutual explanation, than could have been the case had not a crisis occurred.

As the brightest bursts of sunshine often follow the heaviest thunderstorms, so the countenances of both the cousins as they took their places at the luncheon table seemed brighter than either of them had appeared for several days, and the remainder of the day was spent in uninterrupted harmony, the quiet devotion of Stafford's manner to Lady Thornbury seeming to verify all that Maude had

said in the morning, and yet he did not render his attentions obtrusive, so as to excite Mr. Ferris's notice, nor did he in any way slight Maude.

Seeing Lady Thornbury's present cheerfulness Charles Stafford ventured that evening to propose an old favourite song, which was followed by several others, the rich tones of Eleanor's voice thrilling through the very core of two hearts in the room, and fully appreciated by the other two. But some sudden recollection seemed to burst upon her mind in the last verse of "tears, idle tears," and a faltering voice was soon quite lost in an hysterical sob, and she left the room for a few minutes.

A glass of cold water, and a strong determination to overcome the feeling, soon enabled her again to make her appearance in the drawing-room, but there was no more music that night.


As Maude Ferne's head rested that night

on her pillow, and she allowed her thoughts to wander over the events of the day, they chiefly rested in the recollection of that walk in the plantation, and the subsequent scene in Eleanor's room.

“Was I quite true to myself,” she thought, “when I told her I loved him as a brother only? Is it so in truth? Can I see quite unmoved his deep feelings for Eleanor? Have not I sometimes ventured to fancy—Oh, but I am mad to play with such a shadow! Should I not be wiser to return home; and surely she no longer requires me, with so many around to cheer and comfort her. Would Charles be sorry if I went away? But, then, is it not cowardly to fly from my own foolish feelings in this way? I will conquer them; and why not? am I so weak that I must pine for more love than is freely given me? No, I will be brave, and watch calmly my ‘darling visions as they die;’ and try and sun myself in the joys of others, without ac-

quiring the sourness of disposition which the world in general attributes to old maids."

Something whispered that Mr. Hastings was still waiting, with a heart full of the truest love for her; but no! she felt that she could never feel for another as she felt for Charles Stafford; and blushing at her own private confessions, she fell asleep.



## CHAPTER IX.

Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel and lower the proud,  
Turn thy wild wheel through sunshine, storm and cloud.

TENNISON.

"HE cares for me no longer," thought Eleanor, "not that I would wish him again to suffer on my account. But yet if I knew that he had quite forgiven me—that he did not entirely despise me—"

It is ever the case, every other burden seems more easy to bear than the one laid upon us, and in spite of her feeling but too keenly how much the assurance for which she pined would add to her present perplexity and trouble, she felt a sort of resentment



against her old lover for what she considered to be his coldness and indifference.

Charles Stafford, in the meanwhile, amid the tumult of conflicting thoughts, came to the conclusion that things could not go on for many days longer without an explanation between himself and his hostess; if that heart might yet be won, he would value it even more than he had done at first, he would devote his life to her happiness, his tender care should smooth her pathway, and chase away those dark clouds which appeared to envelope it at present; but if not, if all that bright dream must vanish from his life for ever, better for both that it should come to an end at once; and in spite of Maude's warnings, in spite of his half promise to her, he could not resist the impulse to follow Lady Thornbury, as he saw her in the garden gathering a few late autumn roses, which the frost had spared.

"It is cold, Mr. Stafford," said Eleanor,



drawing her shawl closer round her, with a slight shiver, as he drew near; and held out his hand to relieve her of the basket of flowers. "I cannot trust the gardener to gather these few treasures, they are so precious at this time of the year; just suppose he should gather a bud! what punishment could be too great for him?"

"Will you give me one of your treasures, Lady Thornbury, in memory of—auld lang syne. Eleanor! Eleanor! give me one of those bright late roses to replace the withered violets—you remember them? Ah, I see you do! those you gave me in the Ashwell meadows."

He took the rose she held, from her trembling fingers, as he spoke; but as he did so the rosy petals fell to the ground, and Lady Thornbury burst into an agony of weeping; her excited feelings gave to the fallen flower the importance of an omen; it was the one strain too much, and destroyed for the mo-

ment all her powers of self-restraint, which had been so heavily taxed lately.

"It is all that remains for me," she sobbed, "the desolate heart—the sharp thorns."

"Not so, Eleanor, I trust," said Stafford, in a colder tone; for he attributed her sudden burst of sorrow to some remembrance of Lord Thornbury. "Time, the universal restorer, will yet bring brighter days for you; but forgive me, it was wrong to intrude thus upon your sorrows; only I would ask you to remember, in the name of our old friendship, that if ever a time should come when a true friend might hope to remove one of those thorns—soften one of those sorrows—it would be my greatest happiness."

The difference of tone did not escape Eleanor, and it struck a chill to her heart.

"We were talking of old times," she said. "One thing I must ask—it would be a comfort to me even now, to hear from your own lips that I am forgiven—tell me, only tell

me that you forgive the broken promise, the fickleness. O, Charles, you have been bitterly avenged !”

Eleanor was like one walking blind-fold towards a precipice; she knew the answer that must come, yet she could not deny herself the happiness of finding that she was still dear to him, even though she should the next moment have to bid him farewell for ever.

“You could never have doubted of my forgiveness,” he said, still with the same calm coldness in his tone, for he had had time to remember Maude’s warnings, and feared to lose a precious chance by speaking more openly, at a moment when he could scarcely doubt that something had occurred to renew her grief for Lord Thornbury’s loss. “You were too bright and dazzling as well as too young, to have been allowed ever to pledge yourself to a vagabond barrister, just starting off for the ends of the earth. It is I who have a hard matter to forgive myself, for taking advantage of your youth and inexperience.”


"He cares nothing for me now," thought Eleanor—"nothing! but it is better so, and he shall never know that my heart is broken."

"Let us take another turn, Mr. Stafford, and then I must take in my roses. You have never told me what you think of Maude; is she not improved since you saw her last?"

Charles Stafford could speak warmly enough now, the topic was one on which he might freely say all he felt, and Eleanor listened in no enviable mood to his praises of her cousin, and she left him at the hall door, with a choking feeling of hopeless misery.

"Yes, he loves her," she said half aloud, as she threw herself on the couch in her own room and buried her face in her hands. "Yes, it is as I foresaw, and if she does not care for him now, she will—she must; but I cannot bear to see it; let them take their happy faces elsewhere, and not stay here to mock my anguish."

But softened thoughts came soon. "Why should I grudge them their happiness? I



have chosen my own fate! it only remains for me to endure it to the end!"

Lady Thornbury appeared at dinner in unusually good spirits, her eyes sparkled, and a flush on the cheeks, which had been so pale lately, excited Mr. Ferne's observation.

"How well you look, my dear, this evening—you are quite blooming. I was glad to see you taking such a nice walk with Mr. Stafford this afternoon. I am quite sure there is nothing like air and exercise, when it is not too damp."

Mr. Ferris looked up quickly.

"I thought your walk had fatigued you, Lady Thornbury," he said. "You forgot, I presume, that you had promised to ride with me?"

"I had forgotten it," she answered in a low tone, which sounded strangely apologetic in Charles Stafford's ears; "to-morrow, if it pleases you, I will be ready. I will not forget again," she added, nervously, and Staf-

ford saw that her hand shook violently as she raised a glass of wine to her lips. She dared not trust herself it seemed, and put it down again, untouched.

That evening Mr. Stafford announced his intention of going to Sydenham the following day to see his sister, as he thought she would be about returning home by that time. Lady Thornbury received the intelligence with a downcast air, which did not escape Mr. Ferris's observation.

"Your sister must be very anxious to see you," was all that Eleanor ventured to say; and her words sounded cold and indifferent to him.

"Ah!" he thought, "how little she cares whether I go or stay!" and a cold chill struck to his heart as he saw Mr. Ferris go up to her and whisper something confidentially.

Mr. Ferris had whispered—"Does your friend, Mr. Stafford, know the honour you have done me in accepting my hand?"

"No, he does not," gasped Eleanor; "but he shall know—he shall not come again," she added hurriedly, alarmed by the expression of his eye.

"Let Miss Ferne tell him, if you like, Eleanor. I advise you not to show too much interest in him now, for your own sake."

She bowed her head, and to avoid further conversation sat down to the piano. She dared not trust her voice that night, but sat playing wild snatches of melancholy airs, with Mr. Ferris standing by her side.

"You look ill to-night, dearest," said Maude as she wished her good night, scarcely able to command her voice. "How are you really? do you think you get stronger?"

"I am not well; how could I be! do you know, Maude, I am actually beginning to wish this miserable state of suspense and restlessness was at an end. I am like a drowning creature, I catch for an instant at every straw that comes in my way; when



all is over and my fate is fixed, there may be a kind of dead, dreary calm, and then—”

Eleanor held up her thin, wasted hand, with a smile, such a sad, wintry smile, that Maude could only take the poor hand in hers, and cover it with kisses.

“Maude,” said Eleanor, after a minute’s silence, “Charles must be told of my engagement. He must know it soon, and I would rather it was told him gently. Not that he cares for me now! He guesses something, perhaps—at all events he pities me—and it may still grieve him to hear—”

Maude’s heart sank within her, as Eleanor told her that she was to be the one to deal the blow.

She earnestly entreated the task might be spared her, and that Eleanor would write a few farewell lines to him; but she begged so earnestly that Maude would break it to him gently herself, that she at last consented.

Maude knew Charles Stafford’s habit of

walking on the terrace before breakfast every morning, and greatly to his surprise and pleasure she joined him there the next day.

“Maude,” he said, after the morning salutations had been exchanged, “what is the matter? how you tremble! it is too cold for you—go in again—or let me fetch you a warmer cloak, if you are brave enough to continue your walk.”

“Mr. Stafford,” said Maude, gasping for breath, but feeling that if she did not begin at once, she should have no courage left, “Mr. Stafford, do you remember the agreement we made on this very terrace some time ago, that you were to trust me as a sister,—and—”

“And that you were to tell me when I might speak to Eleanor! Ah! do I not remember it, dear Maude?”

He interrupted her in so joyous a tone that her heart sank as she thought of the pain that awaited him. He looked anxiously at her, struck by her extreme agitation, and waited for her to speak again.

"Dear friend," she said, "I grieve for the pain I have to give you—that time can never come now—Eleanor is engaged to Mr. Ferris."

He staggered as though he had received a sudden blow.

"Maude! what can you mean? it cannot be! you must have misunderstood!"

"Alas! it is too true!" she said, the tears gathering in her soft eyes. "Oh, Mr. Stafford, bear it bravely," she added, laying her little hand upon his in the depths of her pity and sorrow.

"Do not fear for me—do not sorrow for me," he said after a minute's silence, followed by a deep sigh. "This explains all her strange capricious manner, her coldness; but how can I have deceived myself thus! fool that I have been twice to dream that she loved me, twice to have been so deceived!"

An angry flush rose to his brow, and Maude saw, or thought she saw, with a little lightening of the weary load at her heart, that there

was more of anger at being again deceived than of misery at the thought of having a second time to give up his fickle love. He took the little hand that still rested on his and pressed it to his lips.

"Sweet sister," he said, "what should I do without you ! ever ready to pity and comfort, ever ready to heal the wounds inflicted by one so false—so heartless—yet so dear !" he added in a low tone. "Dear Maude, leave me alone for a little while. I would not wish that she or her new lover should see my sorrow," he added rather proudly. "She shall not again exult over her too-easily deluded victim."

A bitter smile crossed his face, he pressed her hand and left her.

Charles Stafford was rather late for breakfast that morning, and the rest of the party were all assembled round the table when he entered the room. Maude dared not lift her eyes to his face as he took his seat ; but she need not have feared. He talked and laughed as usual, and nothing but a slight additional

shade of paleness betrayed that he had heard any agitating communication that morning.

During breakfast Charles intimated that he was going to leave by the mid-day train, and Lady Thornbury received the information with that terrible calmness of despair, which now seemed an acquired mood. He found time, however, for another few minutes' talk with Maude, and fresh disclosures of the nobility and generosity of his feelings towards her cousin calmed Maude somewhat at the time.

The dreaded moment of parting at length arrived. Stafford's pale cheek and compressed lip alone betrayed his anguish; as after having exchanged friendly farewells with Mrs. Crofts and Maude he crossed the hall once more to the morning room, where he knew he should find Eleanor alone.

"Good bye, Lady Thornbury," he said, "thanks for the kind welcome I received and the happy days I have spent at Woodside."

He held out his hand.

Eleanor thought she had nerved herself with courage to endure all, but now she staggered, and would have fallen, had she not sunk into a seat which happened to be near, and a look of such misery passed over her features that Charles Stafford was struck by it, he lingered yet a moment.

"Can this be utter indifference," he thought, and at that moment there came across him one of those strange flashes—in which a sort of instinct one might almost say—makes clear things that are dark enough to the higher faculty of reason.

"Eleanor," he whispered, "one word—do you love Mr. Ferris?"

Eleanor put her hands before her face and said shuddering, "O, no, no!"

"Then why, O why, put yourself in his power; how has he drawn you into it—into this fatal engagement?"


"Hush," she said, "I cannot speak on this subject, least of all to you—go, go—leave me to bear my misery alone."

"Eleanor," he said, taking her cold hand in his, "Eleanor, will you not hear me; you would have trusted me once, you would have trusted me as a husband; have I given you any reason since to cause you to think me unworthy of your confidence?"

"None, none, noblest and best," sobbed Eleanor.

"Then trust me now, my own, my only love, tell me all, and believe that if any sacrifice—if life itself—or the love that alone makes life sweet to me—if such sacrifice can make you one degree less unhappy, how cheerfully, how thankfully it shall be made; but you must tell me all, dearest, or how can I help you."

The door opened quietly, so quietly that Charles Stafford heard it not, but Eleanor's sudden start caused him to look round, when he encountered the eyes of James Ferris fixed upon him with such intensity of hate, such almost savage ferocity, that the colour rushed to his brow, and an angry fire shone in his eye.



Eleanor, too, saw the look, both looks, and a dread rose in her mind of the consequences that might ensue if they had any opportunity of speaking together in their present temper. Mr. Ferris recovered himself first.

"You will be late, Mr. Stafford," he said ; "you have barely half-an-hour to reach the station in."

Charles glanced at Lady Thornbury, that glance decided him.

"Do not go to-day," she said, "can you not put off your journey one day longer?"

"I shall not go to-day," he said, "I shall not leave Woodside until Lady Thornbury desires me to go ; perhaps Mr. Ferris may feel that I am an intruder, but I believe I am Lady Thornbury's visitor, not his."


"At present it is true," said Mr. Ferris, in a cold, sarcastic tone. "Lady Thornbury can entertain what visitors she pleases, and far be it from me to interfere with her wishes ; but I came now, to ask her to give me her attention for a few minutes."



"And in the course of the evening," said Stafford, in a cheerful voice, to reassure Eleanor, who he saw was trembling violently, "I too, shall claim the privilege of old friendship, and ask for a little quiet conversation with you. There are many things that puzzle me," he said in a lower tone, "but, Eleanor, take care, let him not draw you into any promises."

With a slow and faltering step she led the way across the hall, into the small room which Lord Thornbury had made his study—the room in which he had died. Eleanor had been using that room lately ; for the first time since those sad events had occurred, she had been looking over many of her late husband's papers, and of her own, and burning old letters, which she had no wish should ever fall into the hands of Mr. Ferris.

"This room !" said Mr. Ferris, "I own I rather wonder at your taste ; however, it matters not to me—perhaps the associations may be pleasant—they recall, I daresay, the



day on which you found that codicil. Eleanor, I did not understand, until to-day, how true those words of Lord Thornbury's were—however, I warn you."

Eleanor started up—

"Leave me, Mr. Ferris, leave me, instantly! this passes even my patience, this insult I will not endure:—go!" she cried, nerved to unwonted courage by the recollection of Charles's words.

And seeing him about to speak again, she seized the bell, and before he could prevent her, a loud peal had rung through the house.

"Nay, Lady Thornbury, I would not if I were you, call the servants to be witnesses of our little scene. I will leave you until you are calm, until you have recollected the relation in which we stand to each other. I entered the drawing-room for the purpose of wishing you good bye, little thinking I should interrupt such a much more tender leave-taking. Sudden business in London calls me

away for a day. I shall return the day after to-morrow. After what I saw and heard, it is necessary that I should recall these little circumstances to your memory. Lady Thornbury beware! and in your intercourse with your new guest, remember that you are my promised wife—remember it, as you value your good name—that name which you have often told me is dearer to you than life itself! If the remembrance of those expressions of your late husband's opinion of your conduct, can move you thus in this quiet room, how will you like to hear them repeated in the ears of the world—in an open court of justice—proclaimed to all?"

And with these words he left her. She put her hand to her head, and felt dizzy and faint, but even in that moment a feeling of thankfulness filled her mind, that Charles Stafford and Ferris would not meet again that evening.

"Ask Mrs. Brooks to bring me a glass of

water," she said to the servant who appeared in answer to the bell. "I am not well; tell her to come immediately. Do not disturb Mrs. Gale."

"My mistress is very thoughtful," said the latter, taking another mouthful of buttered toast, "if there is a meal I like to enjoy in peace it is my tea, and she knows it. I hope Mrs. Brooks you do not object to going—shall I have some hot toast ready for you by the time you come back."

"Never mind, I can do till supper time; poor lamb, how ill she does look!"

When Mrs. Brooks entered with the glass of water, she found Lady Thornbury leaning back in the large easy chair, so pale, so motionless that a horror seized her lest her lady was dying. She held the water to her lips and then said, "let me fetch some one else—where's Miss Maude—let me send for the doctor?"

"No, Sarah—do not call any one, I shall

be better presently—take care of me, Sarah—lock the door—let no one come in—lock it I say directly, or that man will come again.”

“That he shan’t,” said Mrs. Brooks indignantly, “and has he been vexing my darling? O the wretch—but I beg your pardon, my Lady.”

A violent flood of tears somewhat relieved Lady Thornbury’s mind, but left her so exhausted and weak that she told Maude, who went to find her, as soon as she returned from the walk, that she should not come into dinner with the rest of the party; “but,” she added with a faint smile that “she hoped to be able to join them in the drawing-room afterwards.”

“No, dearest, do not—stay here and rest, and I will do my best to take your place.”

“Mrs. Brooks will stay with me,” said Eleanor with a sob.

“Maude it reminds me so much of the old days, the very old days, when I used to be

ill, and dear old Sarah used to nurse me so kindly," she held out her hand to Mrs. Brooks as she spoke, who patted it fondly, and kissed it as if it had been still the hand of the little child she used to pet.

"O that I were a child again indeed! to-night I almost feel as if I were one—as if so many years were wiped away. O Maude! that I could begin life again."

"There is yet time dearest—be brave! confess all and be happy yet," Maude whispered, and she bent over her and kissed her, scarcely venturing to look at Eleanor's face, as she did so—then adding aloud, "be a good child then to-night, and keep yourself quiet, and be very obedient to your nurse—I need not tell her to take care of you," and with a nod to Mrs. Brooks she left the room.

As her white dress disappeared through the doorway Eleanor closed her eyes, and lay perfectly quiet and motionless. For some time she felt too weak, and her head too dizzy to think.

She felt conscious, however, of a feeling of rest, and calmness that astonished herself—those few words of Charles Stafford's had changed all her feelings—he still loved her—she doubted that no longer—they were not many words ; she repeated them over and over to herself, but they were enough for her—she felt that his love had never wavered—that in spite of all her inconstancy, in spite of all the pain she had caused him, her love could still make him amends for all.

“ When love goes before and illumines the pathway, many things are made clear that else would be hidden in darkness.”

A fearful vision floated before her eyes of the anguish she would have felt had Charles Stafford returned a second time *too late*, and found her married to Mr. Ferris—now the veil fell from her eyes—she felt *that* was impossible. While she had believed him dead, the thought had been hateful to her, but now that she knew he loved her still, she felt that she could tell him all, all her folly and

all her penitence ; but then came the thought, what if her deed were really so dark a one as Mr. Ferris had represented it, what if a shameful exposure and punishment should be the consequence—would it not be still better to go on as she had begun, to bear the pain, and let him at least think as well of her as he could—think her capricious and weak, but not guilty of a crime. She moved uneasily and put her hand to her forehead. She was getting bewildered again, and her brain felt reeling.

Mrs. Brooks came up on tiptoe, her stiff silk gown rustling as she moved. “ Ah, my dear,” she said, “ I thought you were asleep—you have had a nice sleep haven’t you.”

“ No, Sarah, I cannot sleep, but I feel a little rested.”

“ O then I may talk to you, mayn’t I?” said Mrs. Brooks eagerly, for the long silence had been very trying to her.

“ Talk to me as much as you like, Sarah,



but I am afraid my head is still too weak to allow of my talking much to you."

"Oh, never mind that, if you'll only just say yes or no sometimes. There, I always was a talker, and there's no use in denying it; and John lets me go on just as you do, Lady Thornbury, and sometimes he don't say more than yes or no for a whole day together; why what's the use—I can tell everything better than he can; not but what he *could* speak if he was obliged, and so can you, you know, if I say anything that you don't like."

Eleanor could not help smiling, which delighted Sarah greatly.

"There now, I've made you better already by talking to you. I don't hold with moping, I never did; and it's my belief that Miss Maude's a deal too quiet for you. She's very pretty behaved like, that's true; but she did ought to cheer you up and make you laugh a bit. What a pretty room this is," she continued, after a minute's rest. "I've never seen

this room lighted up before ; how nice it looks ! I wonder why you don't sit in it more, but I remember—" she stopped suddenly, " I hope you don't mind what I said—you must never mind me, you know ; now do stop me if I talk too much."

" It is a comfortable room," said Eleanor, rousing herself ; " but for a long time it was painful to me to use it. I always seemed to see the figure of poor Lord Thornbury, just as he was brought into it that day, and all his desks and papers are still here, and the books he used to use."

" Ah, yes, to be sure—I thought that must be the reason. What a deal of furniture you have in this house ; then, to be sure there are lots of housemaids to clean it ; that great chair now—all carved work, in and out—I do always wonder what gentlefolk can see in those things, all cut about so. There was John's mother, she had a great old bed, with figures for the posts, all carved out beautiful,

but the old people got frightened, for when the moon shone out bright they made such shadows, they said 'twas like ghosts; at last, one fine moonlight night, the old woman said she could stand it no longer, and John's father, he got up and fetched a hatchet and chopped them off plain; and Mr. Hastings—Oh, he was vexed when he heard of it!"

"I am very fond of that old-fashioned furniture," said Eleanor. "Have you noticed that escritoire, it is very handsome."

"Do you mean that large thing in the corner? I did not know that was the name of it. My mother had one, just the same shape; old Mrs. Bolton gave it to her years ago, when she was getting the house ready for the squire that is now, and his wife. Poor old lady, she didn't like to go away, sure enough, but the young missus, she would not have her stay on no account. Mother was servant there years, and the old lady told her 'twas something to begin housekeeping with, for she

knew she was going to be married; but, la! we never called it such a fine name as that; we didn't know no better, we always called it the bureau."

"It will do just as well," said Eleanor, "they are very old-fashioned things, I do not think they are ever made that shape now."

"Ours wasn't so handsome as that, 'twasn't likely it should be; but it looked very nice for all that, and when I was good, mother used to let me polish up the brass work for a treat. Ours had secret drawers in it too, such curious places—this one is just the same, I daresay."

"No," said Eleanor, "there are no secret drawers in this; Lord Thornbury used to keep all the farm bills and papers in it."

"Mother said 'twas years after she had it that she ever found out the secret drawers," continued Sarah; "she found a spot of rust on one of the brass knobs, and she was rubbing it very hard, when all at once the looking glass sprung out, and there were two little

drawers behind—such a curious place. Is there a looking glass in yours ?”

“ Yes,” said Eleanor, listlessly, “ I believe there is.”

“ Oh, do let me see,” said Mrs. Brooks ; “ now that would be strange if there should be drawers in yours just like ours.”

“ Very well,” said Eleanor, “ some day you shall, but I have left a number of papers there now, and it is all in confusion.”

“ Ah, dear,” said Mrs. Brooks, “ how I should like to have the doing up of this room, it wouldn’t be like the same. I’d put the couch the other side of the fire, and your large chair in the corner ; it should not look a bit like the same ; ’tis a deal pleasanter I think, than yours upstairs ; why you can’t see nothing from that, nothing but the woods and the water, and here you can see everybody that comes to call ; ’tis so cheerful like.”

A tap at the door arrested the flow of Mrs. Brooks’s words, and Maude glided in.

"You are looking better, dear Eleanor! so much better. Are you able to come into the drawing room, or shall I send you in your tea?"

"Oh, let me have tea here with Sarah this once. I am better, but I still feel dizzy when I move. Yes. I had better stay here—many voices confuse me. How did they behave, Maude?" she whispered, eagerly.

"Who?"

"Mr. Ferris and —"

"Charles. O, you forget; did not Mr. Ferris tell you he went away directly—sorely against his will?" she added, smiling. "But I had a message to give you—will you see Mr. Stafford this evening; he thinks you will—shall he be disappointed, dearest, or are you really too unwell?"

And Maude took her hand and looked at her with an expression in her soft eyes, which made Lady Thornbury's colour rush to her brow.

“ O, Maude, it is not that—I am better.”

“ Then I shall tell him you will see him after tea.”

Eleanor held out her hand to detain her, but Maude shook her head, and ran out of the room—to receive a lecture from her father, because her cheek was flushed, and her eyes sparkling.

How delighted Mrs. Brooks was to wait upon her at tea,—to put in the sugar and cream for her, just as she had done when now and then in the happy days gone by Eleanor had lingered over her walk until the tea hour had found her at Huntly Farm.

That hour passed quickly—too quickly for Eleanor, and the blood rushed back to her heart in an almost suffocating tide, as again there was a knock at the door—not Maude’s light, but confident tap—but a louder, stronger, yet a more hesitating one. She tried to cry “ come in,” but the words died away on her lips, and she could only point to the door,

which Mrs. Brooks immediately opened, and then left the room as Charles Stafford entered. She started up and held out her hand for one moment, then a sudden change of feeling came over her; she sank back again, and clasped her hands over her face, and bent down her head till the long black hair hid her burning cheeks. She had made up her mind to confess all—she had thought her courage was strong, but now—now that the moment was come, what could she say—how could she tell him of her weakness—her crime?

Charles saw her hesitation, and waited for a moment or two in hopes it might pass away, but seeing the nervous trembling that shook her whole frame, he gently took one of her hands and drew it away from her face.

“Eleanor, dearest,” he said, “you are in trouble, and you will not tell me? have you not owned that you trusted me? tell me all then, and let us consult together; when sorrows are shared they become lighter, dearest,



and who has a better right than I to the privilege of helping you?"

"And you have forgiven me then, Charles, for my broken faith, for all the trouble I have caused you."

"Ah, my poor Eleanor, you have suffered also! let us think not of the past. Only tell me what stands in the way of our future being brighter—this Ferris—"

"Yes, Charles, I must tell you all—forgive me, I do trust you, it is only because—because—I value your good opinion so highly that I have shrunk from confessing my fault to you—my crime—he says it is a crime. Charles, could you bear to see me disgraced for life—tried—punished—and it is all in his power, one word from him!"

"Eleanor! Eleanor; tell me everything—no, it is not possible, you can have done nothing of this kind—"

"Not willingly—O not willingly, but in

one moment of passion—and blinded by shame and sorrow.”

The spell of silence once broken she found it easy to go on. She told him all—her hasty deed—Mr. Ferris’s discovery of it by questioning the servants and Mr. Drayton—and the use he had made of the fatal secret—by terrifying her into giving him her promise of marriage.

“It was when I thought you were dead, Charles,” she continued. “I was broken-hearted, and I thought it mattered little what became of me, I had been very ill, and was still weak. I thought I could not live long, and that my good name was worth saving.”

“My poor Eleanor, what you must have suffered !”

He drew her nearer to him, and kissed her forehead. She looked up at him with an anxious enquiring look.

“Then you do not quite hate me, quite despise me?”

"Hate you! despise you! Will you *honour* me, Eleanor, by promising that this dear hand shall be mine, come what will. Will you promise me this first, and so give me double strength to fight with Ferris, a legal fight I mean," he added quickly in answer to a sudden startled look in her dark eyes—but that look had answered his question. He had no need to repeat it, the slender hand rested quietly in his while he went on to question her carefully respecting all that might throw any light upon the subject of her troubles.

"But that promise, Charles—you know, I promised that I would be his wife."

"Do not let that trouble you," he said, "remember that he terrified you into giving that promise, that need not weigh on your conscience for one moment. Did you ever give it him in writing?"

"O no, no," she cried, "I never wrote a line to him that was not in direct answer to some question of business."

"That is well. And his letters? have you any of his that allude to your marriage with him as being the condition on which he will keep the secret?"

"I believe so," said Eleanor. "I don't know why I kept them, but he seldom or never wrote unless he had something to ask on business matters."

"That is well too. You know, Eleanor, that I studied the law before I went to Barbadoes, and I still remember enough of it to see through this man's villany—aye—and perhaps to catch him in his own toils."

"Ah do you really think so?" said Eleanor her face lighted up by a radiant gleam—"but no, dear Charles, he is so deep, so wily. I am afraid you look too hopefully upon the matter."

"Not so, Eleanor, Woodside Manor must go at all events, I am afraid."

"O, Charles, you do not think that I still care for that? At first, I own, it was very

painful to me to think of losing it; but since you have come back, I have never given one thought to *that*. O no, this place has been the scene of too much misery. No; it is the thought of those dreadful words—the thought that every one should know the light in which my husband held me; O that is bitter,” and again she bent down her head and wept.

“I can quite understand your feelings,” replied Stafford, “the horror that such accusations must have filled you with, the sorrow at finding that your husband could have stooped to such revenge, and then your firm conviction of his repentance, when, alas! it was too late! It was natural, very natural, and I can sympathise with it all. My poor Eleanor! cheer up, dearest, and hope for the best. But I must not linger over dreams of new found happiness; I must be up and doing. But you look so pale and so tired I shall leave you for to-night. To-morrow I shall have a clear field; Ferris will be away, and I intend to make

the best use of my time. I must think well over our conversation before I can decide upon the first step to be taken. Good bye, my Eleanor, sleep well, and let there be a little more cheery look in your dear eyes to-morrow."

It would be vain to say that Eleanor closed her eyes that night, though a feeling of rest and peace, to which she had long been a stranger, filled her mind. Maude came to her, as usual, her sweet face beaming with the purest pleasure.

Ah, had she not spoken truly when she had told Eleanor, that her happiness and that of Charles Stafford had been the dearest wish of her heart? Other wishes, other hopes had indeed filled that heart for a time, but it was now her duty to conquer them, and she, with no wavering will, nerved herself to the effort. It must not be disguised that her cousin's confession that evening caused her many a throb of pain, combined with deep and unfeigned delight. There was no coldness, no half-

heartedness in the kiss that sealed their good-night; but in the stillness of the night—in the silence of her own room, a hard battle was fought, and with a brave heart and high courage, Maude Ferne crushed down the feelings which had so insensibly grown from pity into love, and thankful indeed she felt that her secret was her own.

When Stafford left Eleanor that evening, it was to seek Maude, and consult her as to every particular connected with Lord Thornbury's death, and these she had heard repeated so often by poor Eleanor, in her vain lamentations over the past, that she was able to satisfy him as to every point he wished to know; and the result of much conversation and thought was, that Charles Stafford determined in the first place to call on the surgeon who was present at the time, in hopes of finding him able to give his testimony to the fact of the great eagerness shown by the dying man to have that fatal paper destroyed.

## CHAPTER X.

Yea, truly, is it not a sweet surprise ?

TENNYSON.

CHARLES STAFFORD, like some others within those walls, had but little sleep that night, and he was up and ready for his ride by seven o'clock.

Mrs. Gale insisted upon his swallowing some coffee and eating some breakfast before he started for his ride, and to save time and argument there was nothing for it but to obey.

He mounted and rode to the house of Mr. Drayton, the surgeon, who had picked up those unhappy documents, when Lady Thorn-



bury fell fainting by the side of her husband's deathbed. ●

Maude and he had agreed that he was a man of such well-known benevolence and good sense, that he might safely be consulted about the events of that morning, and it was with some satisfaction that Charles saw as he rode up, a benevolent face peering out through the middle pane of the sash window over the door, with its lower limb plastered with shaving soap.

"All right," said Charles, with a smile, "he is at home, and will soon be down."

He rung the bell; a boy took his horse, while the maid showed him into the surgery, as she thought, no doubt, he must be a patient, coming at that time of day.

He had not long to amuse himself grimly with the endless jars and square drawers with abbreviated Latin labels on them, and to calculate how many of them were what the great Bob Sawyer called "dummies," before Mr.

Drayton appeared, and begged he would follow him to a warmer room. He knew the horse, he said, and had hurried up, trusted her ladyship was not ill, nor anyone at Woodside? wished to know what his commands were, and he would attend to them at once.

Charles apologized for his very early visit, and explained that he wished this interview should be considered as strictly private—that things had occurred which had much troubled Lady Thornbury, which he as an old friend of hers and her family, had, with her consent, undertaken to set right.

Mr. Drayton was immediately all attention, and Stafford continued, that Mr. Drayton would in all probability have a clear remembrance of the last moments of her husband—he would remember his anxiety, (so the poor Baron's dumb gestures were interpreted,) to get something from the *escritoire*, and that a will and a codicil were produced—but that he sunk in death before more directions could take place.

The doctor recollected all this—assured Charles that he could never forget that look of anxious despair, as of the mind vainly struggling in the meshes of the dying body to explain its wishes—and then he himself went over the whole of his recollections of the scene. Her ladyship's swoon and removal to another room, and how before he left, he thought it best to take with him, and leave with her the documents and the keys of the *escritoire*—and how he told her such papers should be put away and kept safe, as they were important.

“It is,” said Charles, “about one of those papers, which has been destroyed, that I wished you to try and remember. I have studied law, and from a conversation with her ladyship, I am under the impression that the smaller paper was not a codicil as is alleged, but a preparatory draft for one.”

Mr. Drayton said “that one of them was plainly a will, regularly signed and sealed, but it seemed as if the other paper was that on

which the Baron's eye was fixed; it did not look like a perfect legal document, and glancing at it as I held it in my hand there seemed allusions to quarrels and accusations—and yet there were in large pencil writing three signatures; the date was in full, and in larger characters than the rest, so that I saw it was a date, though I did not notice the month or day precisely. But it's a pity she did not take care of it. I begged she would, though poor thing, she did not look up to business, and I really ought to have put it away safe myself. How was it lost or destroyed?"

"My dear sir," said Charles, "you must know something of the unhappy state of things which Lord Thornbury's suspicious and jealous temper kept up at the Manor—that paper combined a cruel and merciless accusation of his poor wife with his last will, that in case of her surviving him, and marrying again, Woodside, and everything, except what was hers by settlement, should

pass to the same distant relatives who possess the entailed estates in Lincolnshire. Some hours after you left those papers at her side, she took up the smaller one and read it—what it contained I only know from her—she says it was cruel, unjust, and a stain upon her character as a wife. She fell into a passion of grief and indignation—remembered the earnest look of her husband, his anxiety to get that paper—and hardly knowing what she did, she determined to destroy all traces of a quarrel which ought never to have been recorded. She believed she was doing what the deceased meant her to do—she burnt it.”

“Dear! dear!” said Mr. Drayton, how truly sad! “no doubt she meant well, but what a scrape it is, if really it was a codicil.”

“Ah, sir, women never can be made to know law or business! You see then, sir, why I ask you as one trusted so long by the family, to help us in this dilemma. Lady

Thornbury has no thought or wish of evading the legal will of the deceased, she regrets her anger and her haste, she wishes sincerely that my surmises may prove right, that the paper burnt was only the rough draft of a paper still existing somewhere—but I have more to say. The deceased had a lawyer and chief agent, who after the funeral served the will in due form, but afterwards told my lady in private that he must search the *escritoire* for a codicil which he knew to be there, because it was drawn up and instructions given for its signature by himself. Keys were given up—every place was searched, but nothing found. The man then rudely charged her with its destruction, and she retorted on him his being a party to so base and scandalous an accusation, which she owned she had burnt in her first rage and passion. You may guess the rest ; she knew not the amount of danger she had incurred ; he has taken advantage of her ignorance, and

persecuted her with it ever since. He believes her, as she values her good name, entirely in his power, and has made use of all her vague terrors to intimidate her into a conditional promise, which I will not name. Well, you see, then, the point of my inquiry is, was that paper a completed codicil or not; if it was, much terrible trouble lies before us; if it was not, then probably another copy exists. My surmise is that he has it in his keeping, or that it really has escaped search here. You are sure they were pencil marks, not real signatures?"

"No, I am not sure, but such was my impression; indeed, the abusive names I caught a glimpse of, made me more anxious that it should be put aside, and not left for servants or others to see. But, Sir, I think Mr. Archer might help you farther, as my lord made a friend of him in everything—in all business transactions; and I hear that often he has turned away his jealousy by kind friendly

counsel. You won't mind the ride as I see you are well mounted. Will you take some breakfast with me?"

"Thank you very much," said Charles, pressing his hand. "I cannot delay—he returns tomorrow, and I must try all I can ere then."

The doctor saw him remount, and said, "I shall be at the Manor tomorrow, to see the cook, who is ill; and may be I shall see you. You may rely on my secresy and readiness to help you, in court or out; but I trust it won't be pushed so far as that."

"It will be pushed to the utmost that pride and malice can go—if it can be pushed at all. But I have great hope. Good morning."

Mr. Archer was in his garden, busy in spudding docks and dandelion from his lawn and his gravel walks, and paused to reconnoitre a handsome stranger, riding in on a horse glossy with speed and speckled with foam.



“Excuse a very early call, Mr. Archer ; I wish, if you will be so kind, to consult you in Lady Thornbury’s behalf, who needs your advice in a business matter, as a known friend of her deceased husband. My name is Stafford ; I am visiting at Woodside. My business is extremely urgent ; and no time, if we are to help her ladyship, must be lost.”

“My time and interest,” Mr. Archer replied, “as I trust Lady Thornbury knows, are ever at her call. The gardener shall take your horse, and let us go at once to the library.”

He led him through a labyrinth of borders to an octagon window, opening into the garden, and seated between the fire and table they were soon in earnest conference.

Of course Stafford in substance repeated his talk with Mr. Drayton, told every whit of the position of Lady Thornbury, of Ferris’s persecution and cruel hold upon her, his own hopes as regarded the burnt paper, not confirmed, it is true, but more hopeful from Mr.

Drayton's impressions; and then he delicately brought in that gentleman's conviction, that if anyone could give a further clue to the entanglement, Mr. Archer, from his intimacy with the Baron, would be the most likely person to do so.

Mr. Archer looked grave, as a magistrate might, without unbecomingness—compressed his lips, gently puffed his cheeks, and looked straight at the fire.

"Let me see," he said, "this explains much that has puzzled me lately. I certainly did witness the signing of a codicil by Lord Thornbury. I remember it broke up my hopes of a run with the Craven, for my poor friend wrote *you must come*. This silly diary of mine will recall the date," and he opened his desk and turned the leaves of a Harwood scribbled over at wide gaps and intervals, "yes, here it is. December 9th, 'wrote to decline Colonel Ashdown's invitation, went with wife to Woodside, stayed two days.' Yes, then it

was, I recollect, and no one there but themselves."

"Are you quite sure?" said Charles, his blue eyes brightening with sudden light. "O, thank God, if you are! That document destroyed bore date in character larger than the rest, as Lady Thornbury observed as well as Mr. Drayton, *November 30th*, the day of an unhappy broil between them; it was written with the impression of jealousy red hot upon it."

"Jealousy, sir?" said Mr. Archer, "you surely forget yourself. The document I signed as witness was a simple, straight-forward, not uncommon instrument, only so far amending his will as that in case of a second marriage, Woodside Manor, which was, as you are aware, a purchase made by Lord Thornbury, about five years ago, should pass to the entailed possessor of the rest of his property."

"I see it," said Charles, "you were too good a friend to be asked to sign such a

scurrilous, cruel paper as that which Mr. Drayton saw and regretted, and Lady Thornbury in virtuous, but too hasty indignation, burnt! The paper destroyed was one reconsidered by Lord Thornbury; there exists another, then, the true and binding codicil, which must be found. I told you of the agony of Lord Thornbury to get that paper, and no doubt it was remorse at leaving behind such expressions in reference to a wife who had tried her utmost to soothe his last moments, which made him so earnest. If you are sure sir, you signed a codicil since November 30th, surely that is enough "

"I can swear to it that I never witnessed his signing, never heard till now, of his signing any paper but that I mention; but surely the simplest thing is a further search. Look here, leave your horse here, I'll order my carriage and go over with you at once to the Manor. I will also get Woodley to meet us to dinner at seven, and you must return

with me and devise what to do as we shall find our way. It was not Ferris, but Woodley who drew up the codicil. I see more and more light, sir, as we go on."

They arrived at luncheon, and Eleanor seemed quite herself again, and Maude, with her tender secret of deepest friendship, yet most unselfish resignation, looked like some ministering spirit on her cousin's and her friend's hopefulness. She was the mirror of all Eleanor's anxieties as regarded the terrible position and the clue they hoped was opening out of it.

After luncheon Lady Thornbury saw Mr. Archer alone, in her room, the room that had been her husband's. She did with him as with Charles, and told him everything. She received with untold gratitude to Heaven, the great hope that Charles had not too sanguinely guessed at the worth of that vile paper.

"My dear lady," said Mr. Archer, "no codicil exists in force, that I am aware of, but

one, and that certainly had nothing personal in it. Where is it? It concerns you deeply indeed, but I feel sure that you are as anxious it should see the light as we are. I come then to search and to rummage, to play all sorts of violence with Bramah locks and Chubb's patent safes. We *must* find it, unless indeed, that rascal has it," he muttered to himself.

"God grant it may be found, my kind friend!" she said; "only Mr. Ferris has searched, and failed to find it; it was thus he discovered my reckless folly. And how shall we prove to him it was no true codicil; he says he drew it up himself?"

"Leave me and your friend, Mr. Stafford, to deal with him. Meanwhile, we must hunt. Once find the actual paper, and all lies in a nutshell; but, even at the worst, we are ready for him."

"Oh, thank Heaven for my good, kind friends!" she cried, and fell into an agony of weeping. And then she roused herself, collected all the keys, and began the search.

"Nay," said Mr. Archer, "call the confederate hound in too. Here! Mr. Stafford," he cried at the door.

"Call Maude, too," said Eleanor. "Ah, and I will call Mrs. Brooks."

"No, no," said Mr. Archer, "no servants."

"Yes, but she is not only a special old nurse of mine, but has already, though I was too dull to avail myself of it, suggested *how* to search."

"Hark to her, then," said the fox-hunting Squire, in his best humour; "hark to the old brache—ferrards!"

Mrs. Brooks came in, with much merry importance, and said:

"I told my lady there must be drawers in that old writing-cabinet, bureau, or whatever you call it. They glasses were never meant for looking glasses; see how they turn in all askew like, not a bit as any one can see to put their cap straight."

"Oh, Sarah, that is to show your real self! See, now, your right arm really moves as you

stand opposite ; in other glasses it would seem to be your left arm that moved, that accounts for the shape."

"Never you mind, my lady. I'll be bound there are drawers for all that ; deep ones, too."

"Very deep !" said the Squire, with wisdom, looking over his spectacles.

"Now, you just see here," said Sarah ; "this knob is a drawer, that's plain ; so is this, all empty too. But in mother's bureau, one of the drawers came right out, and then a notch was pulled by the left hand, and then you'd see—"

"Try it ! try it !" said Charles, eagerly.

Three or four of the drawers would not come beyond their depth, but one came clean out, as Sarah intimated.

"Now, Mr. Stafford," cried Sarah, with such a triumphant look at the Squire, "you shall do the rest, and think of old Sarah if you find anything."



Charles felt up and down the cedar nest for the drawer, and with difficulty reached with his fingers a brass bolt, let in square with the opening. He pulled it to him, and at once both mirrors shot open, and two drawers, half their depth, were revealed.

"There now, that's just as I said!" cried Sarah; "depend on it, one carpenter made this and that one as was given to poor mother. Oh, I know the looks of furniture."

"This is important," said Mr. Archer, eagerly seizing some papers which appeared when the drawers were opened. "And this, and this—here it is!" he cried the next moment; "here is the real codicil; and here is a note of my lord's own writing."

"Oh, do not read them," said Eleanor, sickening with the remembrance of past scenes.

"Nay, we must, dear lady," said Mr. Archer; "and they explain all. There is nothing that anyone might not hear, who

might hunt for this codicil. I will keep them till presently," glancing at Sarah.

"Dear Sarah," said Eleanor, "you have really done me great service; go now, and bring me my tea at five o'clock, and I will tell you all; you have deserved it."

"This," said Mr. Archer, "is a copy of a letter written to Ferris:

" ' Dec. 3rd.

" ' DEAR SIR,—I have destroyed the codicil you drew up for me according to order. I can frame another from the rough draught, omitting personal remarks, which further consideration suggested were out of place. I will not trouble you to come such a distance, as it is such a simple matter; and if need be, I can call in Mr. Woodley. Only, remember that such a document does exist. I will of course destroy the copy of the old one also.

" ' Yours faithfully,

" ' THORNBURY.'

"The other is from Mr. Woodley, fixing the 9th of December, and eleven o'clock, as the time he will call."

"The sum then is this," said Mr. Archer, "my noble friend regretted his not having burnt that draft; perhaps behind that most pressing feeling, there might have come, had he lived, the determination to destroy the codicil itself. Heaven has seen otherwise. This is good in law," he said, waving the codicil, "that which my lady burnt was mere waste paper."

"Thank heaven—oh thank heaven," said Eleanor, "and now my only perplexity is how to be rid of this rude tyrant Mr. Ferris—I cannot see him again, his dark look of scorn and rage has too long haunted me night and day already."

"That shall be an easy matter, dearest Eleanor," said Charles; "we simply turn the tables on him, his hold on you is snapt as you see; but in that very holding, he has


become a party to whatever fault could be laid to your charge; he has used intimidation, and this shall be brought home to him at the proper time—I wonder at myself! but the fellow is not one I can get up much proper anger about; he is too contemptible a schemer for that—dangerous in the dark—pitiable in the daylight—we have blown up his fox-earth, and our work seems to be to drive him away rather than punish him. He has degraded himself from any equality with us, we must treat him like a thief or an assassin.”

“There is truth, sir, in what you say, but if I read our man aright, he will not quietly accept of any such estimate of his own character; be he never so vicious, he is proud as Lucifer, and strong of will, and utterly unscrupulous. Now if my lady will let me, as her husband’s old friend, I will in her name acquaint the man with the discovery of the missing document, and with the fact that Lady Thornbury requires his services no more. He

will not be here by any train till to-morrow afternoon, and you will be here to defend the house and its inmates from any Berserker rage he may fly into."

"Nay," said Eleanor, "I am growing back into my own utter unconcern about the man! He has obtained his end so far, to be sure, that if I marry I must quit this place for ever; but then one need not marry you know," with an arch look at Charles, who seemed lost in abstraction.

"Mr. Stafford returns with me, my lady, but will be here early, long before this lawyer can arrive; but you see it is necessary now to tie up this fellow's tongue if possible, and to hold over him some real threat, not that all that has occurred cannot be explained to reasonable and feeling hearts—but there are facts, which malice, if we cannot check it, may make mischief out of. Mr. Woodley meets us at dinner, and though much more has been discovered without his help, it may be well to consult to-



gether over walnuts and sherry—eh? so I will write a letter and leave it with your servant for Mr. Ferris when he comes, and then Mr. Stafford will order the carriage and be off—so pack up your razor and comb, as they say in Ireland.”

It was so clear that whatever needed doing, must be done at once, that Eleanor felt less disappointment than she otherwise would have done, at the first evening of unembarrassed courtship being stolen from her.

They contrived a few concentrated minutes of joy and congratulation before the carriage came round—not much said, indeed, but that little counting for the best of words.

“How little have I dared to dream of this, dearest!” cried Charles.

“How little too could I once have thought with what a solemn yet most happy feeling I can quit all this weary state! yes even home, and all for my dear and only, only love! Now do come home early—I cannot have that wretch without you—”

"You may be sure I shall be on my way as soon after their breakfast as I can, and we will have a walk after luncheon."

As the carriage rolled smoothly on its homeward road, Mr. Archer ventured to approach the subject of Charles's position with Lady Thornbury.

"You have known my lady many years, Mr. Stafford?"

"I knew her and her family before her marriage, and before my leaving England."

"Did you know Lord Thornbury?"

"Not at all, Sir."

"It's a sad thing that codicil after all, very usual as such things are. We shall be so sorry to lose her from the neighbourhood when she does marry, and of course she is too young and too beautiful to be left for ever in widowhood; should not you say so, Mr. Stafford?" looking queerly at him over his glasses.

"Time will tell, Sir," he said, but could

not meet that jolly bantering look without betraying his happy secret by a blush.

"Time will tell? I should think so. Now you see how proper it is, Sir, for me to act as dispenser general with that rogue's services; it would not come well from you, eh? that is, not yet, eh?"

"Well, as I owe so much to you, Sir, I will be frank, for we are both leagued in our lady's name against this sordid schemer. Lady Thornbury, as Miss Leigh, was my special friend. Had not my fortunes dragged me to the West Indies, she had probably been my wife. She is now free, and I have never for a moment thought of another; the fates, to speak profanely, have brought our lives back again to the same old hopes—long dead to us both, and my first love will in due time—God grant it—be my wife."

"Well, my good fellow," said Mr. Archer, "I wish you joy. I read in your face and hers, that the loss of Woodside hanging over



you will not deter you from this rash step. And solemnly let me add, it has been no bed of roses to her; her recollections of it will not much vex her in the happy home which real, unambitious love will make yours, I trust. You must suppose, my intimacy with both the husband and wife gave me much opportunity of observation. Dreadful—I know no other name for it, as her discipline has been, I doubt if either of you can thank heaven enough for the result; she has grown most wonderfully under it, and that unhappy passion about the paper, and that rash and unwise act of hers, which, as she told me, she never will defend, but ‘acknowledge to have been sinfully weak,’ such were her words; yet even that has taught her a lesson she never will unlearn. How little in the scale titles and broad lands weigh, against the possession of a good name and a clear breast. She told me she was only thankful to have had Woodside within her power to keep, that she might

make some sacrifice to test real love, if it was ever granted her. I am an old friend, Sir, and she speaks out, for her heart is full. In short, my friend, you are a lucky dog. And, excuse a comparatively old man's philosophy—her love, in spite of all your dreams out there among the sugar canes, is worth ten times more now than when she accepted Lord Thornbury. But here we are; and there is Woodley—with my spud too, by Jove! I don't generally allow that, but you'll find our friend of the quill pretty free. I am sorry Mrs. Archer is out, visiting at her sister's, but we shall have a bachelor trio, just for one short evening, you know; there's no help for it, is there?"

More walnuts and sherry were discussed that evening than any definite lines of action.

"The lawyer felt delicate," he said, "in speaking of a brother of the quill, otherwise *he* should certainly consider him, to a certain extent, a confounded rascal." He was as

amused at the account of the hunt and its success, as an old fox-hunter is at hearing the run mapped out over the mahogany. "Yes! I put it there, you see, but I did not know anything of the secret drawer. Of course, I thought he, like every one else, locked up his papers. 'But,' said he, when all was done, 'put that in if you please, sir, in that drawer that is open the upper part of the cabinet.' So in I popped it and closed the doors, which went in with a snap, and I saw my ugly face in two glasses at once. A queer fellow was Lord Thornbury when business was on hand, always in a hurry, but anything omitted in haste, stood a bad chance of overhauling again. It was his opinion that, without putting her ladyship to much trouble and pain, not to say expense, the charge of intimidation could not be brought home to Ferris. It was a most happy thing the codicil was found, as any lies forged by him would now be either libellous, or if founded on fact, there were great facts to put against


them. He much doubted whether such a charge would hold water; but," said he, cracking his last filbert, with a rattling laugh in his throat, "if my lady likes to try it I'm her man! Were it not unprofessional, I should really prefer ducking him, or tarring and feathering him. His hold on her being gone, he will, I guess, keep away for his own sake." One cannot help contrasting with this festive view of grave matters, the subject himself of these rather free remarks, as he rolls on through the night in the corner of the first class, sullen and sensitive, conscious of a coming trial for the prize he believed himself so sure of, and strung up in every nerve to grasp it.

## CHAPTER XI.

Haste me to know it, that I, with wings as swift  
As meditation, or the thoughts of love,  
May sweep to my revenge.

HAMLET.

MR. FERRIS, as we have hinted, was determined by a forced march to be first on the field that day of rendezvous, and took the night train to Warrendale. There he slept, or tried to sleep, but was off early for Woodside, and was driven up all unexpectedly in a hired gig at ten o'clock. Great was the dismay of poor Eleanor; she sent for the man who was entrusted with Mr. Archer's letter, and said that if any one enquired for her she would see no one till the afternoon. The letter was on the



slab, all ready for Mr. Ferris's arrival, and met his eye as he walked quite at ease into the hall. He read it as he walked carelessly into the room usually allotted to him.

"Insult on insult," he growled between his clenched teeth, "does she dare thus to treat me! Ah! she thinks, I see, that all is clear for her now the codicil is found. She thinks the kind, good intention of burning her lord's will and testament with scorn, before he was cold in his shroud, is to go for nothing! She has scorned me! be it so; but I have a bone to pick with that tall placid ape, Stafford too—burn him! By Heaven, I'll pay him out come what will! I'll speak to him. He *shall* answer all this to me."

He rang the bell violently, and found, a little to his confusion, that the footman was in the room behind the screen.

"Is Mr. Stafford here?" he said, "can I see him, as her ladyship does not appear till later?"

"Mr. Stafford is not returned yet, sir; he is at Mr. Archer's, and is expected about twelve o'clock; Mrs. Gale said so in the hall, but now, sir."

"Ah, indeed, that reminds me—well, just see if I can have a gig or horse to go over to Greenhill at once. Stay, is the gig gone?"

"Yes, sir; the man drove off as soon as your bag was out; but I'll ask John to step up and say what horses are in."

Meanwhile he paced the hall, looked over the whips, which hung dusty and unused,—at least the hunting ones, on their pegs.

"That will do—do well," he said, as he took down one with a heavy hammer for its handle, and a stout, heavy thong; "that will do. Well, John, can you mount me, or send me in a gig to Greenhill? I have business with Mr. Archer. I must *see* him—not write, time is precious."

"Very unlucky, sir," said John, in a hoarse chronic-sore-throat tone of voice, "My lady's

carriage is gone to take Mrs. Brooks to Beechington; the dog cart is gone to 'Unter's for a new spring; the only 'oss in the stable is Rob Roy, and I don't care to put strangers a-top of he, 'cos you see, sir, he requires good ridin'; he do. He goes with me safe enough, 'cos I feeds 'un, but blessee, he's as nervous as a child, given to rear and bolt; but if you'll only wait for Mr. Stafford, you can ride the old 'unter, Bay Malton, anywhere. Rob Roy's a brute, sir, to them as isn't very familiar wi' 'osses, and I never likes strangers to cross 'un; he don't like them neither."

"Never you mind, John, trust me to ride the devil, if you'll saddle him. Rob will be the first horse that ever said no to me—go saddle him quick! I have no time to lose; and you, William, tell me my way to Mr. Archer's."

"Oh, it's easy enough for that; you must keep the main drive through the Park, and go out to the left of the lodge, into the turnpike



road, follow that road through the pike, and go to the top of the rising, and take the bridle road over the common towards Blackburn farm,—a farm house with three gables. Here you are on the Warrendale road; keep to the right, and Mr. Archer's house is a mile or two on."

"Hang this fellow, what a time he is," said Ferris, beating his boot with his whip, or looking at it complacently.

"This will tame the brute," he said, speaking to the footman. "He'd better not dispute with me. Tell your mistress I *will* see her. I have business when I return, that I must and will explain to her—so I leave my luggage, and will have a fly to fetch me for the evening train."

Rob Roy was brought round,—a handsome chestnut; he showed no symptoms of temper more than other spirited, high-fed things. Ferris sprang to his seat with his usual easy, horse-training air; and as the thorough-bred

marched haughtily but obediently away, John remarked :

“ Lor ! I never thought that fellow—a quill driver as he is, could ride so well—he’s made to ride ; he must think I pretty free with my advice, just now, I guess. He’s all right enough, The ’oss ye see ’ll go like a lamb in the blinkers, and that’s why my lady keeps him ; but he needs a man as can ride, so it’s all right. Lor ! he canters off as gentle as if he know’d the gem’man could manage him.”

Charles, too, had started on his homeward road. Poor fellow ! perhaps the very necessity of business, and of devoting himself to work out Eleanor’s deliverance from her troubles was best for him. He could not but know that she really loved him now, and was burning to requite him for all the bitter past. She had unlearnt ambition from the weary discipline it had brought down upon her. She was then more than ever to him now—so lost—so found—so dead—so reviving !

Her confessing to him all her faults had moreover shewn him the depth of that good ground, which being long overgrown with weeds and thorns, had been by her great trials harrowed and opened to the clear light of virtue and hope again. Yes! he should see her with that dear smile, and trusting, onward gaze—it had indeed misled him once with false hopes, but now surely all was his without reserve. Woodside of course must go.

“I would not have her keep it if she could,” he said to himself. “She cares not for it—and the will is plain enough—it must go. That fiend Ferris will try all that malice can—but the law will not serve him—and I still hope those autographs of his may tie his tongue if not his hands—heigh ho! my pretty fellow—patting his horse—this common will do for a gallop.”

With light and thankful heart he sprung on his homeward way, thundering up the gently swelling hill, and reining in for a more park-

like canter on the top, when he found the road took a sudden bend through a coppice, and saw a rider advancing to meet him. He could not be deceived, it was Ferris. Too courtly in general, and too full of love at this particular time to suspect ill blood, he reined in his horse, and lifted his hat to Ferris, and would have passed on without deigning to notice the angry looks of that gentleman. But Mr. Ferris was, though hasty, a man of business, and he came for business such as it was.


He pulled his horse across the narrow lane, and without returning Charles's salute he said, "I rode to meet you, sir,—though I hoped to have reached Mr. Archer's first, and horsewhipped both of you at once for your impertinent crossing my path. Lady Thornbury has given me her word that she will marry me, and you dare to cross me in my love and passion! you had better consult your own honour and peace by keeping out of my

way, or you may fare worse than now—" and he actually to Charles's surprise lifted his arm and whip.

"You mad fool," cried Charles, "take care what you do—I seek no quarrel—but I do not fear you—I can play at that game as well as another—hold back, sir, and let me pass."

"No, no—you pass not so easily—but first to business, tell me—or I will tear it from your throat, what has passed at Woodside since I left, what document has been found! where found? and what is its worth to her who has done what she shall live to rue?"

"You waste time," said Charles, red with suppressed anger, which yet he tried to direct if not to quell. "I tell nothing for threats—let me pass," and he spurred the hunter forwards—which made Ferris's horse reel and jump back—but Ferris losing all restraint over his passion, lifted again the heavy whip, with the thong wound strongly round his



hand, and the iron handle held aloft, and struck savagely at Charles's head. It fell on the quick guard made by Charles's right hand and slight whip—but Ferris was strong as well as passionate, and missing his head, it fell on his bridle arm as he passed, and for a minute paralysed it."

Charles was cool at once when real danger was upon him; he reined back his horse with his right hand and tried to pass on the other side, so as to have his right hand free for guard or stroke—and as the change gave Ferris also a free swing for his weapon, he returned to the charge with the same fury as before.

Charles's numbed fingers could hold, but scarcely guide the reins, but his horse was temperate, and when Ferris had brought his hammer down upon his hat, he seized the chestnut by the curb, and pushing his own horse on with his heel, backed his adversary to the hedge. The chestnut snorted with

sudden rage, ran back rearing and shaking his head, and Ferris could not get him to attack again ; turning his rage then on the poor brute, he dashed his spurs into him, and got him close to Charles by a demi-volte, but, plunging, and roaring almost with rage, Rob Roy reared straight up, fell backwards, and rolled over, got on his legs again, and would soon have been at Woodside without his rider, but was caught by a labourer ere he was well off the ground, and was held by him, though with great difficulty.

“Are you hurt, Sir ?” asked Charles.

“No, but I’ll pay you both out for this, ere long.”

“*Au revoir*, then,” said Charles with cool effrontery, and walked his horse gently on his way, to recover his breath and his thoughts.

He had nearly got back into the poetic rapturous vein of loving expectation, when, on about the last half mile of the common, he heard the unmistakeable clattering of hoofs

behind him, and began to string his nerves to meet a second assault from that unscrupulous hand.


On came that furious assailant, and Charles faced his horse round to be ready, but at a glance he saw that the rider had no choice of attack, but was run away with. He was red with rage, he could see, as he flashed by him at full speed, with his whip in his mouth, and with both hands vainly tugging and sawing at those bleeding jaws. Charles thought not of danger—he is too old a rider, he said to himself, to be run away with far, or at any rate be thrown if his horse keeps his legs. So Charles, half enjoying the rebuff to his foe's much vaunted horsemanship, rode on; he would not hurry, lest he should seem wantonly to irritate him. There was a crowd almost at the turnpike, as he could see from the hill-top.

“Market day, I suppose, at Warrendale. I shall hear which road he took.”



But when at the gate, he saw at once that something strange and terrible had happened. There was blood—quite a pool of it, in the road, and behind a crowd of men and boys he could see the long gaunt limbs of the poor chestnut stiffening, as they had been dragged out of the way of passengers, quite dead. The topmost bar of the turnpike gate, which was now open wide, had been snapped off short, and a splinter from the upright bar had pierced the lungs of the unhappy beast, which had been mercifully put out of misery ere Charles came up. But what of the rider? that poor frantic hater! Ah, what of him!

“Will you please to come in, Sir,” said the gate-keeper, “I spose you knows this ’ere poor gen’lman as has broke his neck, and I be sorry to say is dead or dying; there be a sight of folks in there,” he said, “but he’s stranger like, and no one knows who it is. Sam Lush says the hos, poor thing, was one of my lady’s up at the Manor.”



"I fear, my good man, I know too well who it is. Mr. Ferris passed me at full gallop on the common; I could hardly believe him run away with—he was so good a rider I have heard. Mr. Ferris, the lawyer of Lady Thornbury. Has any one of the Manor people been here? Do they know it at the house?"

"Noa, as I sed, nobody don't know nothan about the poor man, so do come in and see if 'tis the lawyer—"

There lay the well-knit frame of his late hot-brained enemy, the eyes closed—thank heaven, as Charles would feel—and the storm had passed from the relaxed and marbling brow and lips. The doctor soon arrived, but all too late—it was all over before he came. The gate-keeper told Charles that he was hurled by the concussion of the horse and gate for some feet onward, on the iron-bound weighing machine, and fell on his head. The doctor said the upper joint of

the spine was snapd, and he must have died on the spot.

Charles said he would hurry to the house and send proper persons to see to everything required, but he must break it carefully to Lady Thornbury. And so remounting he was soon at the stables of Woodside, pale and worn with conflicting feelings. John saw how ill he looked, and ventured to say "maybe you did not meet the lawyer on Rob, did you, sir; he asked William the nearest way to Mr. Archer's?"

"A terrible accident has happened, John—but you must wait till I have informed her ladyship of it—the poor man was run away with and was killed at Ashton gate. He passed me at a gallop on the common—I learnt the accident at the gate—both horse and rider are dead. It is terrible news to bring home, John, but don't let any one in the house know of it for the next half hour or so."

"Dear, dear," said old John "I be so

glad—sorry I mean for the accident, but so glad that I told Mr. Ferris aforehand, and warned him to wait till you came back on Bay Malton—dear, dear, poor Rob too, poor Rob!”

Leaving John to his soliloquies, Charles Stafford avoided that side of the house where he guessed Eleanor might be waiting for his return—he crept round to the morning room where he hoped he might find Maude alone. Yes, he must use her gentle, useful tact and strength of mind—not that he doubted Eleanor’s fortitude, but Maude—so Charles of course imagined, was less feelingly mixed up with this sad business and its hopes and fears thus rudely brought to a full stop. He found Maude and Mrs. Crofts quietly working there, and aftersalutations of rather troubled sort, and explanations of his thus creeping into the house, he told both of them, for there was nothing to conceal—all that had occurred, as to the accident. He thought it best that

Maude should announce it carefully to Eleanor—that Mr. Archer should be written to, and if any one knew of the poor man's relations they should be summoned.

“The body must remain, the doctor said, till the inquest, which will be held to-night, as soon as the coroner could be sent for, and of course I shall have to attend—God knows,” he broke out in an unexplained passion—“that though the poor fellow died in bitter enmity with me, I would have done anything to prevent so terrible an end as this!”

## CHAPTER XII.

"All precious things discovered late, to those that seek them  
issue forth

For love in sequel works with fate, and draws the veil from  
hidden worth."

TENNYSON.

"Yes! all went well," said Charles, the next day in answer to a question of Eleanor's respecting the inquest which he had been required to attend, held on the unfortunate Ferris. "I feared at first there might have been some trouble, as the man who caught Ferris's horse 'thought' he had heard loud talking in the wood just before; but as he deposed to the fact that the gentleman swore he was all right when he got upon his horse again, and began to beat it unmercifully for rearing,

and 'seeming,' the man said, almost out of his senses with rage; the fact of the accidental death was clearly proved without our names being in any way mixed up in it; which was fortunate."

In spite of the feeling, which they could not help owning to themselves, that the death of Mr. Ferris had relieved them from many anxieties and perplexities, his sudden and violent end cast a gloom over Woodside.

Eleanor sorrowed deeply for poor Lucy, whose love for her brother had blinded her entirely to that darker side of his character, which his unhappy passion for Eleanor had brought out. Her love for him amounted almost to idolatry, and the terrible shock of his death nearly overwhelmed her.

It was difficult for Charles to tear himself away from Woodside, though after two or three happy days, in which all their hopes and plans for the future were discussed, he did remember that his sister had returned to

Sydenham, and was anxiously waiting to see him.

Mr. and Mrs. Ferne consented to leave Maude with her cousin for the six or seven weeks that remained before Eleanor had completed her second year of widowhood, as she had determined at that time to resign her old home to its new possessor. Maude therefore remained to assist her in making all the necessary preparations for removal. When, at the expiration of that time, the two cousins bade adieu to the scene of so much sorrow, it seemed a relief to Eleanor's mind as she took leave of those stately rooms and that fine park.

"Oh, Maude," she said, as they drove for the last time down the avenue on their way to the station, "believe me, dearest Maude, it is not for sorrow at leaving my beautiful home that these tears will flow; no, they are tears of thankfulness at my unexpected deliverance from my cruel bondage;



and at the bright, happy future which I may now venture to look forward to!"

It had been Eleanor's wish, warmly seconded by Maude, that her second marriage should take place, as her first had done, in the dear old Norrington church; that the deep heartfelt vows of love and obedience to the husband of her choice, should be blessed in the same place where those too hasty and thoughtless ones had been spoken before. And so it was to be.

Poor Lucy Ferris had been dangerously ill since the shock of her brother's death, and Eleanor could not be induced to fix her wedding day until the crisis was past, and the poor girl was pronounced to be recovering.

Miss Hastings, as we have seen, had formed some suspicions as to the state of affairs between Maude and Mr. Stafford, which came very near the truth, and she watched Maude so anxiously during this time of Eleanor's residence at Oak Cottage, and especially dur-

ing Charles's hurried visits, that Maude often felt herself blushing painfully under her eye. At length, one evening as they were returning from the school together, where Maude had told her friend that all was now settled, that the Earl of C. had obtained an appointment for Mr. Stafford in the Mediterranean, which would oblige him to leave England in the course of the next month, and that Eleanor intended that he should not go alone, Miss Hastings ventured to say, hesitatingly, and without looking at Maude, "And you, dear, are you pleased at this marriage? Are you happy?"

Maude stopped, took her companion's hand, and looked archly in her face. "Margaret," she said, "you are the very worst dissembler in the world. You know you think at this moment that I am heart broken, do you not? I know you have thought so a long time, ever since I dined with you at Bolton Park on Arabella's wedding day. Now, don't deny

it but tell me? do I look so very miserable?"

Miss Hastings smiled at the bright beaming look that met her own, but shook her head a little sadly.

"I see I shall not be believed, Margaret, unless I tell you all my foolish fancies. But you will not misunderstand me, I am sure," Maude added, in a graver tone. "When Charles Stafford returned first from Barbadoes, ill in body, and so wretched at finding Eleanor married, I met him as you know at St. Leonard's, and did my best to console him. He sought every opportunity of talking with me then, and whenever we met afterwards; you know how agreeable he is, and how much we have all liked him, and will not wonder to hear me own that there were times when I wished it might be possible that I might fill the place of his lost love. I was wise enough however, never to disguise to myself the fact that it was only for her sake that he sought


my society ; and lately, dear Margaret, since he has become so happy again in her love, it has become plain to me that my feelings for him were more of pity than of love, I look upon him again as a dear brother, and in his happiness and hers I am completely happy."

Miss Hastings looked up, and read in that sweet face the truth of her words, and was content. It is probable that she afterwards related some parts of the conversation to her brother, together with her own comments thereon, for from that time might be dated a change in his manner towards Maude ; a return, in a great measure, to their old intimacy and freedom of intercourse, which had for some time been unavoidably interrupted.

Maude felt embarrassed at first, and whenever she saw Mr. Hastings approaching, felt a strange desire to become invisible, however, she had just at this time so many other things to occupy her thoughts, that this did not long trouble her. It seemed that she and Eleanor

could not make enough of the few weeks that remained before the parting, which must so soon come.

“Poor thing!” said Mrs. Bolton, about a fortnight after the second wedding had taken place from Oak Cottage, “poor thing! to think that after all it has come to this! Such a fuss as there was made at her first marriage, ’tis indeed a sad falling off; well, perhaps it is better than her marrying that Ferris, as we heard she was going to do; for my part, I never believed that story, and you see I was right after all, as I generally am. I don’t quite know though, now I think of it, that it is better. Ferris was a rising man, a very pushing man, he didn’t let the grass grow under his feet, and Charles seems so contented, I am afraid he will never do much for himself; and, only think, my dear,” she added, in an under tone to her husband, “How strange it seems now to look back, and think that I once almost wished he could have



had our Arabella! Tell me, my dear, did you see the young couple? You have been to Oak Cottage this afternoon, haven't you?"

"Yes, I saw them, and wished them a happy voyage; they go to Southampton tomorrow, and sail next morning. I never saw any one so altered as Eleanor is! She looks as blooming and beautiful as she did before she was married to Lord Thornbury, and younger too, I do believe."

"Ah! well, poor thing, I am glad she looks well; she will have to rough it now, and will have need of all her strength. Why I suppose they can't make up more than a poor six hundred a year between them, and that, with her notions—Ah! well, well"—such thoughts as these, however, little troubled the happiness of the new married couple, as with hearts filled to overflowing with love and thankfulness, they sailed on their way to their new home. Of "hopes fulfilled, and mutual joys," what need that more should be said here?

## CHAPTER XIII.

Be strong to hope, O, heart!  
Tho' day is bright  
The stars can only shine  
In the dark night.  
A. PROCTER.

It would be too much to say that the joy Maude Ferne felt at the happy termination of Eleanor's troubles, sincere and heartfelt as it was, was quite unmixed.

After the excitement of the wedding was over, there were moments when she felt painfully lonely. For so many months her thoughts had been so engrossed by the sorrows and struggles of her cousin, by the fears and hopes for her, which had chased each other so rapidly, that it was no wonder the

dull routine of the life at Oak Cottage had no longer the same charm for her as in days of old, before the realities of life, with tints of more glowing brightness, as well as darker shadows, had dawned upon her. Of one thing, however, Maude owned to herself with a heart full of thankfulness, she did now feel sure, and this was, that her thoughts could now revert to Charles Stafford, without any lingering shadow of regret that he had remained faithful to his first and only love. She shuddered sometimes as she reflected how narrowly she had escaped the misery of a hopeless and unrequited attachment, and set herself bravely to return with all her old interest to the various employments which had occupied her time before Eleanor's first marriage.

Somehow or other she found this a far more difficult task than she expected; a shadow seemed to have fallen across her path, and she felt painfully conscious that Nor-



rington was not now to her, what it had been.

It is true that careless observers would not have remarked any change in Mr. Hastings' manner towards herself, her parents even never imagined it—nor indeed Mrs. Bolton, a far more shrewd observer; but Maude's heart too well interpreted that shade of sadness which had for some time crept over that serene and open brow. And her colour went and came whenever she heard any of the neighbours remark that they feared Mr. Hastings must be overworking himself, he looked so worn and ill.

They met but seldom now. Maude shrank from visiting the rectory, and generally contrived to join Miss Hastings in her walks, or waited for her visits to Oak Cottage.

Some days had passed without any meeting, and Maude was pacing up and down the gravel walk, and trying to make up her mind to call and see what had become of her friend,

but her heart failed her, she did not feel brave enough to run the chance of encountering Mr. Hastings that afternoon. She held in her hand a letter from Eleanor, and as Maude glanced over it again, she wondered why that letter, so full of deep and true happiness, should make her sigh :

“ No, no, my Eleanor,” she murmured, half aloud, “ it is not envy—heaven knows I would have bought your happiness with my own, had I been called to do so, my life does look a little dreary to you, I daresay, seen by the light of your own happiness ; but never mind, Margaret Hastings is the model I have chosen for myself, and surely no woman could hope for a more useful life than hers. As to happiness—” she started violently, for, as she turned at the end of the walk she saw Mr. Hastings advancing towards her.

“ Maude,” he began, while the folding up of Eleanor’s letter gave her a moment’s time to recall her thoughts, “ Maude, excuse my

intruding upon you in this way, but my visit and my errand are to yourself only, and as I saw you from the road, I thought I might venture."

Maude held out her hand with her usual sweet smile, but as she did so, was startled by something in his look.

"Are you ill, Mr. Hastings?" she said, quickly, all feelings of shyness lost for the time in anxiety.

"I am not ill, thank you—but Margaret—"

"What is the matter? tell me!" Maude cried hurriedly, seeing Mr. Hastings could scarcely command his voice.

"Margaret is ill,—dangerously ill, dear Maude."

"O let me go to her. Why was I not told before? Let me go, Mr. Hastings," and she tried to disengage the hand, which, in his sorrow, he still clasped as some kind of a support.

"Not yet, Maude, sit down for a minute, and hear what I have to say."

Maude sat down as she was desired, trembling violently from a mixture of feelings.

“It was three days ago that Margaret was taken ill,” continued Mr. Hastings. “Her first wish was for you, but a dread of her illness becoming an infectious fever, prevented our sending to you. Now, however, since there is no longer any dread of its taking that turn, I must ask if you will come to her? She requires the greatest care, the most constant watching. What I ask of you, Maude, I could not venture to ask of any friend less tried and true, less dear—to Margaret,” he added quickly. “Will you nurse her? I know well that she is very dear to you. But think, Maude, what she must be to me! the only one left to me of so many! the only relic of that dear old home! the only one left to love me. Will you try and save her for me, Maude?”

Maude was vainly trying to control her sobs, and could not command her voice sufficiently to reply. Perhaps he mis-interpreted

her silence, for a deep flush of red mounted to his brow,

“Maude,” he said, “I believe that if there is a chance of her living, that chance lies in your care and watchfulness. I must speak plainly now, it is no time for any false delicacy on my part. Will it make it easier for you to come and stay at the rectory if I go to Ashwell for the time?”

“You cannot think I would allow such a sacrifice as that,” said Maude, holding out her hand frankly. “No, we are friends, and can understand each other too well for any scruple of that sort to interfere. No, indeed, that must not be! how could Margaret bear to lose you. I will go back with you at once. Let me only speak to my mother first.”

Maude’s earnest, eager words overcame all obstacles; Mr. Ferne, after one protest, subsided into resignation to the inevitable; and after her first astonishment, Mrs. Ferne saw so clearly how the whole rectorial household

would go to rack and ruin if left quite destitute of a mistress's supervision, that she offered no opposition; and thus it came to pass, that, in half an hour from the time of their meeting in the garden, Maude was walking by the side of Frank Hastings, on her way to the rectory; and in the strength of her heroic determination to look upon him entirely as a brother, she did not refuse his offered arm, a support rendered indeed almost necessary by her agitation and sorrow.

Few words were spoken by either of them, and never had the walk seemed so long to Maude in her intense anxiety for her beloved friend. The deadly paleness of her face alarmed her companion greatly as he caught a glimpse of it as they entered the door. He led her into the drawing-room and begged her to rest there for a few minutes, while he went to enquire whether any change had taken place in his sister since he had left her.

He returned immediately, bringing a glass of wine which he insisted upon her drinking before she assumed her office of nurse. Maude obeyed him silently, she felt somehow as if she had given herself up to him for the time being, by having undertaken that office.

It was no wonder that Mr. Hastings had been so anxious to secure Maude's care for his sister. She understood it all when she entered Margaret's room. It was one of Miss Hastings' most cherished plans to educate the village girls as servants, and she generally had two or three undergoing the process of transformation; good, useful girls they were, and full of affection for their mistress, but without the slightest idea of the requirements of an invalid, especially of one so weak as Margaret Hastings then was. She was asleep when Maude entered the room noiselessly, and arranging the curtains so as to shade the full sunlight which was streaming across the bed, she sat down to watch

those restless slumbers, so painful and unrefreshing.

It was not long, however, before a sharp spasm of pain contracted the pale brow of the sufferer; she opened her eyes, and a bright smile lighted up her features, as she held out her hand to Maude.

“Yes, dear Margaret,” said the latter, in answer to a few whispered words, so faint that her ear alone could have caught them; “yes, I am come to nurse you. You should have sent for me before; but you will get better now—I shall take such care of you—but let me move this pillow.”

A mute glance of thanks, and a sigh of relief, were Maude’s reward. Days passed, and Maude watched over her friend with unwearied devotion. Every morning Mr. Hastings took her place for a time, while she fulfilled a promise she had made to her father, of taking a few turns in the garden, which refreshed both mind and body, and enabled her to return with renewed energy to her task.



Truly it was a sorrowful time, and very faint were the hopes either of the watchers dared entertain, as their beloved one seemed to be fading away.

It was Sunday evening, and Maude could not help looking more than once at her watch. She had not seen Mr. Hastings all day, for his duties had taken up a great part of his time, and after church, when he had gone as usual to read to his sister, a visit from her mother had detained Maude. So, was it any wonder that she should look forward to tea-time? She feared he would be sadly tired; she knew he had been up the greater part of the night before. The hour struck at last, and Margaret asked for some tea:

"Some of *your* tea, Maude. I must drink tea with you to-night; do go and make it. Frank will be in presently, I am sure; but do not send me any until he comes, or it will break the spell. I shall fancy that I am drinking tea with you once more."

Maude's eyes filled with tears as she went

down stairs. Other nights she had waited until the maid had announced that tea was ready, when she had gone down to pour out a cup for Mr. Hastings and herself, and give her report of the invalid. To-night, however, everything seemed to have gone wrong; there was no tea ready, no lights in the room, and as she walked across towards the bell, the dying firelight enabled her to see that Mr. Hastings was sitting on the sofa, with his head buried in the cushions.

A rush of mingled feelings swept through Maude's mind. Compassion for his deep sorrow, and for that yet deeper which she feared was too surely coming upon him; then one vivid picture flashed across her of his utter desolation when that anguish should strike him to the heart. She went softly up to him, and laid her hand upon his shoulder:

"Mr. Hastings," she said, in a choking voice.

He started, and looked up quickly, with

such anguish written on his pale face, that she could scarcely nerve herself to continue :

“ Dear Mr. Hastings, do not—do not despair ; she seems better this evening ;” and she told him Margaret’s wishes about the tea.

Maude soon made the desolate room assume a more hopeful aspect, and after all it was a more cheerful meal than they had had for some time. Their hopes were confirmed on the following morning by the opinion of the medical man, who announced that the crisis was past, and that he had now every hope of his patient’s recovery, but that for many days she would still require the greatest care.

“ No, you need not look at me so beseechingly,” said Maude, “ I assure you I have not the least intention of vacating my post so soon—unless indeed, you are tired of me ?” she added.

“ Only promise that you will stay till that time,” said Margaret, pressing her hand and

looking at her so earnestly that it brought the colour to her brow.

“Nay Margaret, now you are unreasonable,” said Mr. Hastings, quietly, “you must not become spoilt by having everything you wish—it is not good for any of us.”

Maude felt a little disappointed—she fancied Mr. Hastings also might have expressed a wish for her to remain, and a dread that her presence was in some way or other a restraint upon him, fell like a cold chill upon her spirit.

“A few days longer,” she thought—and I shall be able to leave Margaret safely, and then I will only visit her when I shall be sure not to find him at home; I dare say he will be glad to have the house to themselves again.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

BRIGHTLY and smoothly the months rolled on with the newly-married pair, and it had not entered Eleanor's head that anything could have increased her present happiness, until one day when the always anxiously looked for mail packet brought her an unusually long letter from Maude. Maude too was going to be as happy as herself—Maude had accepted Mr. Hastings!


“Dear Eleanor,” she wrote, “what will you think of my unchangeableness?—but I must tell you how it happened—Margaret has been ill, quite three months, and unable to leave the house—of course I spent much

time with her, and thus I could not avoid being a good deal in the company of Mr. Hastings, I will not deny that as I became more intimate with him and learnt to understand better and better the gentleness and true worth of his character, I was sometimes inclined to regret that I had not taken a longer time for consideration before replying to a certain letter of his, which had taken me so entirely by surprise, as you know. Lately he has resumed his old habit of walking back with me to Oak Cottage; and in one of these walks he asked me whether I ever changed my mind? Somehow or other he managed to turn my answer as it pleased him best, and so we became engaged, and he does not seem to doubt my love because I refused him before, and I am as happy, dear Eleanor, as *you* could wish me to be."

In this, our concluding chapter, we will gather up some of the threads of the former portions of this history, hoping our readers

may feel sufficiently interested in the fortunes of some of the less conspicuous characters to wish to know more.

Sir Andrew Bolton and Arabella seemed to suit each other *à merveille*; the lady became renowned in the hunting field, and added to her other accomplishments that of becoming a first rate shot with a rifle; all which excited fresh admiration and adoration on the part of her husband. As to the sporting baronet himself, he was a living specimen of a tame husband, and had, it must be owned, considerably profited by the untiring instructions, and the companionship of his wife. Before he was launched into the trying scene of a large party, he was duly instructed what subjects he might venture to speak upon, and upon what others a discreet silence would be desirable. It would, perhaps, be unwise to inquire what amount of curtain lectures had been requisite in order to get him into such complete training.



Arabella had been brought up in a good school, and her mother's example had not been lost upon her; if Sir Andrew had been questioned, and had replied in his usual style of conversation, he would have owned that "he usually ran with a snaffle, but that his wife always kept the curb well in hand." As for the Squire of Bolton Park, he seemed likely to retain a long possession of that estate, being as hale and hearty as when first introduced to our readers, notwithstanding his wife's fears of his failing health before the property was secured to her daughter.

Mrs. Bolton is in possession of one unfailing source of regret, in the sad fact of her niece's affections having been stolen away before something really eligible had been found for her.

Anna Fleetwood is as great a favourite as ever with her uncle, and I am afraid it must be owned that it is not with any feelings of sorrow, he hears from time to time that Mr.



Evans's practice does not increase so rapidly as to warrant his taking away Anna from the luxuries to which she had become accustomed.

Anna has paid a long visit to her mother and sisters during the past summer, and Mr. Evans found his way there one Saturday, and returned to Ashwell the following Monday. With what impression Mrs. Fleetwood regarded her future son-in-law, and whether Anna's sisters were as delighted with him as she expected them to be, we have no opportunity of discovering; we believe that Mrs. Fleetwood's chief satisfaction lies in the fact that one of her daughters will be "off her hands," and that in all probability there will be "an opening" for the next in age at Bolton Park, when her sister's marriage takes place.

It is due to Anna to relate that a marked improvement has taken place in the outer man of her *fiancé*, as though his gloves bear evident marks of repair in the form of neat darning on most of the fingers, yet the same

display of tips is now carefully avoided. It is true a peculiar bend will always fix itself in his hat, but the torn brim has long ago been united to its desolate crown. He generally spends two evenings in the week at Bolton Park, besides occasional invitations to dinner, and on every occasion music is the order of the evening, and duets in particular seem to have a peculiar fascination for him. Their engagement seems likely to be a long one—let us hope they may not grow as weary of each other as a less unsophisticated couple might do under the circumstances; and we wish them heartily farewell, trusting the proposed perpetual duet may be one long strain of harmony.

THE END. .



# Mr. Newby's New Publications.

---

*In 2 vols., 21s.*

## FAMILY TROUBLES.

By the Author of "Constance Dale," "The Cliffords of Oakley," &c.

"There is progressive improvement in the works of Charlotte Hardcastle. "Family Troubles" is just what a good novel should be—teaching without preaching—lively without flippancy—combining deep interest and pathos, without any of the sensation scenes so prevalent in modern fictions."—*Express*.

---

Dedicated by permission to her Grace the Duchess of Beaufort.

*In 3 vols., price 31s. 6d.*

## HEARTHS AND WATCHFIRES,

By CAPTAIN COLOMB, R.A.

"Captain Colomb writes like a gentleman of good taste and feeling, with freshness and vivacity. The book is full of vigorous and powerful writing. There is much to amuse, whether in the barrack-room, or the drawing-room, and, better still, by the sea-side."—*Parthenon*.

"It contains vivid sketches of the battles in the Crimea."—*Express*.

"The plot is of continuous and stirring interest, and highly original."—*Saunders' News Letter*.

---

*In 2 vols., price 21s.*

## THE LAST DAYS OF A BACHELOR,

By J. McGRIGOR ALLAN.

Author of "The Cost of a Coronet," &c.

"The style is good, and the portraits true to nature. What more can be said to render a novel worthy of becoming popular?"—*Observer*.

"We can confidently recommend 'The Last Days of a Bachelor.'"—*Sunday Times*.

"We have never seen a more curious and more entertaining mélange of humour and pathos, of thrilling narrative and profound reflections, heightened by scintillating wit and epigrammatic satire, reminding us strongly of Swift and Voltaire."—*Express*.

*In 2 vols., 21s.*

RECA GARLAND.

By KEITH HORNE.

"The tale is cleverly told."—*Athenæum*.

"It will be perused with interest."—*Morning Advertiser*.

"A very amusing and very exciting novel."—*Court Journal*.

---

*In 3 vols., price 31s. 6d.*

FERN VALE;

OR, THE QUEENSLAND SQUATTER.

"By all intending emigrants this novel should be read for instruction. To those who read for amusement it will be pleasant reading."—*Advertiser*.

"We strongly recommend it to every class of reader—from the sober moralist down to the lighter admirer of works of fiction."—*Sporting Review*.

---

*In 3 vols., price 31s. 6d.*

RIGHT AND LEFT,

By the Author of "Mabel," "Sunshine and Shadow," &c.

"It has no faults, and many redeeming points."—*Observer*.

"It has masterly touches of artist-like form and truth."—*Advertiser*.

"It combines all the merits of the author's former works with matured experience, increased powers of conception, and greater artistic force and boldness."—*Evening Mail*.

---

*In 2 vols., price 21s.*

MARY GRAHAM,

By L. J. CURLING.

"Evidently the work of a lady with a well regulated mind."—*Advertiser*.





U



